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By FRANCES FORBES-ROBERTSON

AWTHOR OF "THE DEVIL'S PRONOUN" ETC



WESTMINSTER ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE & CO 2 WHITEHALL GARDENS 1897

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TO DORA CAZALET



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Monsieur Paul

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Monsieur Paul

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SHE sat on the edge of her narrow little bed, and pressed her hands one in the other in childish excitement as Adèle looked at the presents and discussed the coming ceremony. Her face was oddly expressive of the woman and the child commingled, of youthful inconsequence and thoughtful womanhood—of one to whom knowledge of right and wrong had come so early that the understanding was reached before the senses, and evil could not thrive through want of soil.

"All the same, I shall not marry Monsieur Paul," she exclaimed suddenly.

"You'll do it when the time comes, Mademoiselle," the serving-woman answered indifferently. She had evidently heard the statement before.

"That's what every one says. I begin to think it will come true, though I do nothing but explain that I simply won't."

"You made the mistake by once saying you would."

"Only once. Won't all the other times count—all the times I have said no? How I dislike him! Have you ever noticed his ears? They are like mushrooms."

The little rebel was interrupted by the noisy entrance of Marie, who bounded unceremoniously into the room, clutching a brown-paper parcel in her hand. "Another present!" she explained.

Jeanne flushed. "Quick, quick, give it to me," she said. "Oh! the string. Goodness gracious, Adèle, haven't you any scissors?"

"You like the presents if you don't like the wedding," returned the good Adèle, slowly producing scissors which were attached to a black tape slung under her apron.

"Ah! that's it—I simply adore the presents! Look! it's a fan—an ostrich-feather fan. I shall be stuck up. Marie, don't you wish you were going to be married?"

"Yes," pronounced the child deliberately.

"Never mind, when I am married I shall give you a fan. Ah! when I am married I shall do nothing but give you all lovely things. Adèle, think of every nonsense you would like best in the world, and they shall be yours." She sat again on the bed and dangled her legs. The colour crept into her sweet little countenance in shy pleasure, as the wizen, shrivelled maid and the little sister, in schoolroom pinafore, stood staring at her with the envious appetite of age and youth for the things she was describing to them so gaily—things she promised should be theirs.

"And what will Monsieur Paul say to all that?" queried Adèle at last with a heavy sigh of renunciation.

Jeanne shot a look of scorn. "You're always talking of Monsieur Paul. Can't we have a chat

about things without bringing him in? What has he to do with it?"

- "A good deal, I should think," said Marie.
- "You know perfectly well I am not going to marry Monsieur Paul."
- "I don't see how you are to get married and give us presents unless you do," her sister continued.
- "I know, I know. I suppose it will be difficult, only there's no reason why we shouldn't talk about it all the same."
- "Perhaps a fairy will bring you a Prince down the chimney just at the last moment."
 - " No, there are no fairies."
 - "Well, then, your guardian angel."
 - "There are no guardian angels."
- "Mademoiselle!" murmured the good Adèle, in remonstrate
- "There are no guardian angels," she repeated under her breath.

Some hours later she stood twirling her thumbs before her much respected parent, and listening eagerly to his pompous oration, as one trying to catch a reasonable argument to convince herself against herself. He must certainly be very clever, because every one said so. Moreover, he was her papa: one's papa was always clever.

- "You understand, my child," he finished, "that we must know best who is the proper person for you to marry—and this good young man——"
 - " Is he good?" she interrupted.
 - "If by goodness you mean does he go to Mass

every day, is he priest-ridden, or in the hands of those dogs the Jesuits—certainly not!"

"Perhaps his father wouldn't let him go to church—we might sympathise on that."

"I think not," the deputy laughed grossly. She ignored the interruption.

"They say he is very bad?"

"And what has that to do with a young girl?"

"If he is to be my husband?"

"You'll make him good."

"I hate him!" she said deliberately.

"Your religion should teach you a more Christian sentiment."

"You told me Christianity was glorified superstition."

The deputy looked oddly at his offspring for a moment, and then said, "The marriage will take place this day week," and turned to his bureau with obvious impatience to get to pressing work. There was nothing pressing to be done, only a sad little letter from a sad little person to be answered or ignored; but Jeanne respected the affairs of a deputy. She stood watching his broad back a moment, then, in a conciliatory tone, remarked, "The presents are very beautiful."

"Very," he returned. "I am surprised you are not more grateful." He tore the note he held in his hand and threw it into the paper-basket.

Jeanne stole away; she was unconvinced, but her father as deputy was a wonderful man. Long ago he had kept a grocery store—that was long ago; no one mentioned it now: Monsieur Paul would despise a grocery store. After all, the wife of a grocer might

be a very happy person, especially if the grocer had nice ears.

"Ah! bonjour, petite Jeanne! So you are going to be married quite soon. Little mother is out."

"Little mother is always out, and I am going to be a Carmelite."

your wedding gown! You look very charming."

- "I don't think I do; but I love it! Isn't it soft? You would look sweet in it—better than I, with your golden hair. Monsieur Paul would think so."
 - " Monsieur Paul didn't think so."
 - "Do you know Monsieur Paul?"
 - "Yes."
 - "Very well?"
 - " Very well."
 - "Surely he thinks you lovely?"
 - " He did."
 - "Why didn't you marry him?"
- "Ah, you enfant terrible, because you are going to marry him!"
 - "Then if I didn't marry him, you might?"
- "No, no; I am of long ago. He would find some one else—he doesn't care for me any more. I am old—old. And then, it's all over!"
 - " Why?"
 - "Ah! there are no 'whys' about that sort of thing."
 - "You have tears in your eyes!"
 - "Nonsense; it's the cold. It's cold to-day!"
 - "Mademoiselle, is Monsieur Paul very bad?"
 - "Not much worse than most men."

- "I shall not marry him."
- "You are ridiculous."
- "Decidedly I shall not marry him," the girl repeated.

The daintily dressed visitor remained silent for a moment, then exclaimed, in a sudden flash of uncontrollable emotion: "Who are you to refuse? Who are you to throw away what we have prayed for? You, child, to criticise the man—the man we have worshipped, and to whom we have given all, all. Marry him, and thank God if he loves you for a week!"

"Why do you say 'we'?"

"I don't know what I say! There, good-bye—I am sorry—it makes me angry—you are such a child. Give my love to the little mother, and don't tell Monsieur Paul I came."

She took off her wedding dress slowly, watching herself in the glass with a look of regret at relinquishing the beautiful white gown, then she slipped on her green silk—the robe de jeune fille—still short enough to show the little feet beneath. She shook herself into it with a half laugh: a moment after she caught the sound of Adèle's voice talking to the concierge Adèle was going out. She would talk there another ten minutes. The two women's voices arose from the courtyard to her room. She gave a quick look at the presents which were scattered about her on every available chair—on the dressing-table there was a silk purse full of gold: her uncle had given her five hundred francs to buy what she liked. She had a hundred francs in the pocket of the dress she had put on; everybody gave one money when

one was to be married. She would slip out with Adèle; Adèle couldn't refuse, because she was going to be married so soon. She put on her hat, a large hat that shaded her sweet face, then picked up the little purse with a sudden quick movement. "Marie!" she cried. "I say, Marie, I'm going out!"

- "What for?" queried Marie from the dining-room.
- " For fun."
- " Adèle won't have you."
- " I don't care."
- "I shall try on your wedding dress while you're out."
- "I forbid you."
- "Phew!"
- "I say, Marie!"
- "Yes."
- "Good-bye."
- "Oh, good-bye!"
- " Marie!"
- " Well?"
- "You can try on my dress if you like. There goes Adèle—Adèle, Adèle, wait for me! Good-bye, Marie!"

* * * * *

Adèle protested in vain at Jeanne's determination to accompany her on her rounds. "I mean to come," persisted the girl.

- "Madame thinks I prejudice you against Monsieur Paul," murmured the woman in excuse; "she does not like our being together."
- "It doesn't matter, Adèle; I have quite settled that nothing will make me marry Monsieur Paul!"
- "Ah, Mademoiselle! how you will go on! People will believe you in the end, and—and——"

- "And what?"
- "I heard Monsieur say that if you persisted they would shut you up for a week or two."
 - " I don't mind."
 - "In St. Anne's," persisted the woman.
 - " It's not true!"
 - "He said it would bring you to your senses."
 - "They can't prove I am mad."
 - "That's not necessary."

Jeanne turned a little pale. "Do you think they would do it, Adèle?" she said in a low voice. The maid pursed up her lips for a moment. There was the fascination of horror about the notion which is irresistible to the mind of the domestic. The importance of warning her young mistress against such a possible evil sent the good woman's blood tingling with odd satisfaction.

"I do," she said emphatically; but Jeanne had answered the question for herself equally in the affirmative, though with less sensation. She hummed a little tune while deliberating on it. Adèle's sense of the seriousness of the situation was upset. Jeanne was simply a child; yet the fact remained that Monsieur and Madame would shut her up if she did not yield. The proposed son-in-law was rich, and the good woman had some reason to guess that the deputy's affairs were seriously embarrassed.

"I am going into Notre-Dame," the girl said irrelevantly.

"Chère demoiselle, it's impossible. I have so many things to do—enough for an hour, at least."

"Come back and fetch me, then," answered Jeanne, and slipped away across the road and through the

swing door. The servant hesitated a moment, then hurried on.

She stepped from the warm sunlight into the cool of the shadowy cathedral, hesitating on the threshold as a person unused to the solemn silence and dim light. A priest was hurrying down the aisle: he had a round pink face and wore spectacles, which caught

a round pink face and wore spectacles, which caught the light and glistened. He seemed to be looking everywhere at once, flashing about in the manner of a search-light, for repentant sinners, she thought, and wished, with some drollness, that he might go and look for Monsieur Paul.

She stole up the aisle quickly, the mystery of the place falling upon her and enhancing a mood already pregnant with a moral determination. The vast cathedral seemed to be giving her sanctuary. Sanctuary from what? She would not admit to herself that, after all, her parents were those of whom she was most afraid. It was from Monsieur Paul-surely only from Monsieur Paul. Her parents threatened to shut her up in a lunatic asylum; but then it was all about Monsieur Paul !-- the good-looking profligate rose visually before her mind with extended ears and look of Satan. She glanced up at the rich painted window in the deep Gothic setting, and stood fascinated by the gleaming colour and the quaint allegorical design: a green-feathered angel with an immense halo was carrying a child over a stormy sea, the waves of which were symmetrically pointed. She gazed up with something of the expression of a child peering at the plates of a fairy-book, with a wakening befief in the gnomes and wonders represented. "There are no

guardian angels," she repeated to herself, when a side door swung open, and a flood of sunlight made a path before her. Two women in black stood talking, one holding the door with her hand. "The boat train leaves at 6.10. Of course, I shall see them off." The words reached Jeanne, and she glanced back to the guardian angel; the angel seemed to be looking at her. She hesitated a moment, then stole out of the church as quietly as she had come in, and disappeared among the throng of busy Parisians passing to and fro.

* * * *

An hour later the good Adèle returned to the church to pick up her young mistress. She made her way to the Chapel of St. Joseph, and, placing her errand-basket on the ground, knelt down to inform the household saint that she was in need of the "sou," that she would burn a fat candle in his honour for three days if he would arrange a speedy betterment of her affairs. The prayer was short and business-like; she arose to her feet with a sense of "so much the worse" for St. Joseph if he did not grant her petition, and peered about for Jeanne, at first lazily, then with a quick, penetrating look, hurrying silently from little chapel to little chapel.

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"Why did you put her in this room?" the German said quietly.

"What was I to do? I had no other. She begged me to take her. A fellow-passenger had assured her she would find comfortable lodging with me. You

don't all pay so well that I can afford to lose a lodger."

"We don't," answered the man simply, and turned his eyes again on the tossing figure of the little French girl. "What are you going to do?"

" I don't know."

"If she dies, there'll be a fuss about your putting her in here when poor Holland was hardly out. They are very particular about scarlet fever."

"She paid in advance," the woman said, in a kind of mitigation of her fault.

The German was silent for some moments. The grim humour in the idea of this poor little stranger's honesty being rewarded by such reckless hospitality held his imagination. He saw the fiends of infection hidden in the dilapidated walls, clinging to the drab window-curtains and rising up from the worn carpet to leap noiselessly on the unconscious traveller who strayed into their den. Would death come and finish their work? And this poor, wretched woman, who slaved all day for the wherewithal to live, who cheated and robbed her wealthier lodgers and shared her bread with the poorer ones, who got drunk now and then just not to feel quite so low, yet who worked, worked all the same, inebriate or sober, robbing or giving in charity—the poor labouring woman par excellence, would she be had up before the magistrate and harried and insulted and censured by the silk-hatted, busy, swollen heads in authority? Well, the world was an odd place!

"What's a body to do?" she broke in snappishly on his meditations, so that they were brought abruptly to a standstill. He turned them into the

channel of extrication. Something must be done, and immediately.

"The Sisters of Mercy!" he exclaimed, after a moment's pondering. "Why, they are practically at our door. Of course, she's a Catholic! I'll go at once for you."

The woman hesitated. "She talks a good deal about Monsieur Paul. Perhaps, they being nuns——"

The fever-stricken girl rose up suddenly, propping herself on her elbow, and stared at them. They hoped it was a glimmer of consciousness, and waited.

"But why didn't you marry Monsieur Paul?" she said to the bedraggled, gaunt woman. The man dropped his eyes.

"They are human beings, I suppose, if they are nuns, and if they are not—be damned!" he said in the meekest of tones, and walked downstairs and out into the street towards the tall, faceless brick building not a couple of hundred yards off.

* * * *

She stood in the hall of the Archbishop's house. The place was big, and she felt frightened; the servant who had opened the door had disappeared, leaving her quite alone; then a little old man came suddenly upon her and eyed her queerly, as one used to take the measure of a visitor before admitting him further into the hallowed precincts of his master's halls. She faltered out the Cardinal's name, and he snapped that his Eminence was engaged. Anger speedily replaced her fear. She had not asked to visit the Cardinal: the Cardinal had sent for her. "I have an appointment," she said, and her little French head tossed significantly.

"What name?" he demanded with ill-concealed suspicion. She caught the look. English people were certainly detestable, she reflected, and with perfect gravity said—

"Jeanne-Marie." The little old man shook his head and walked away.

When she was in the presence of the Cardinal, the sense of fear took hold of her again. What would he think of her sending up plain "Jeanne-Marie"? She wasn't going to tell her name to that inquisitive sparrow downstairs. Yes, he was just like a sparrow -that horrid little man! Anyhow, she was with the Cardinal now. What ought she to call him? looked like the prints of kings in Marie's historybook at home. He had a wonderful long train. must feel very superior. Well, never mind! had on her big hat, which was quite grand too. He hadn't said a word all the time she had been thinking: it seemed a very long time—she supposed it wasn't, or he would have said something. She stammered "Mon père!" and then hesitated as he smiled at her.

It was a formidable thing to have a live Cardinal smiling at her and to feel she had lost her tongue. She had certainly used the wrong title! Still he remained silent.

"I really don't know what to call you," she murmured confusedly. "It would frighten me to say 'Eminence.' Ce moineau que vous avez en bas called you that. I have never said 'Eminence'—it would frighten me . . . but I will say it if I ought, only I shan't get any further."

He smiled again. Ah! he had a charming smile.

"You shall call me 'Father.' . . . Come, what can I do for you? Why did you want to see me?"

"I did not want to see you at all," she answered deliberately, and her lips puckered up into a pout.

His Eminence's eyes twinkled. "True enough; I wanted to see you. Come, sit down. I have written to your father, you know."

She turned pale. "That won't be very much use," she said, "because I really can't marry Monsieur Paul."

"You shall not marry Monsieur Paul; only we must try and persuade your people to send you some money, or to—in fact, to come to some arrangement."

She opened her eyes wide.

"I don't think they have much money, you know. My stepmother's dresses are very expensive. I am afraid they won't send any."

"But, my dear child, they can't leave you to starve. Something must be done."

" I wish to be a Carmelite."

"I know, I know—nevertheless, such a step cannot be taken in a hurry. The good Reverend Mother who was kind enough to take you into the convent tells me that you know hardly anything of your religion. You have not made your first communion. It is not possible to think of such a thing at present. You know the good God does not call all to such a vocation. Those who take upon themselves such a life of self-abnegation do so after mature and deep deliberation. Submission of will is necessary, and a strong natural inclination for a spiritual life." He spoke in a conventional monotone, leaning back in his high-backed chair, his elbows on the arms, and

his white, tapering fingers meeting before him. She grew frightened again, and this time her large hat did not console her; she did not catch the gist of his speech. A lump rose in her throat. It was not her habit to cry, so she gulped the lump down.

"Would you mind repeating that over again," she said.

The Archbishop did not repeat his oration, but looked at her oddly for a moment. "Jeanne-Marie," he exclaimed, "you must listen when I talk to you." His voice was more human now and gentle, so that she suddenly felt that she loved the great big Cardinal. It was nice of him to say "Jeanne-Marie." She had been sitting on the edge of the chair; she sat back now and put her head a little bit on one side. "Oh!" she said, "how nice! Let's just talk like this."

The good sisters at the convent, who had received Jeanne from the squalid lodging-house, had nursed her through weeks of convalescence, and had besought the Cardinal to take an interest in the "unhappy child," now set themselves to teach her the catechism, just as they taught it to the little children. She was deplorably ignorant, they assured his Eminence, who proposed to instruct her once a week in the deeper questions of the Church's teachings. It was suggested by his secretary that she should be sent to one of the Jesuit fathers for this instruction—"his Eminence was too kind." The Cardinal smiled and stood looking at the prelate in silence for some moments.

[&]quot;They'd fight to the bitter end," he said at last.

[&]quot;Fight!" echoed the scandalised secretary.

[&]quot;Why, yes, good Father, she'd set them all by the O.S. C

ears; she doesn't hesitate to put me in my place sometimes."

"Surely, your Eminence-"

"And yet," he continued, ignoring the interruption, "this wayward child—brought up amidst freethinking, Atheism, and immorality, taught nothing of our blessed religion, unprotected by the Holy Sacraments—retains within her soul the most precious faith."

"Faith?"

"The faith we all need so much and have so little of—the faith of believing that practice and theory must be one, under whatever circumstances——Ah!" he finished, noting the blank look of the priest, "there are some souls we like to think the Almighty has particularly given into our own charge."

His Eminence's secretary was an austere and good priest, whose constant anxiety was lest the world of Catholics should not profit by the numerous indulgences, special prayers, confraternities, and other side exits established by the Holy Church to save their souls. He had an interview with Jeanne on these weighty subjects, and she succeeded in understanding nothing at all of what he said. He ended by presenting her with a little rosary of the dead, which he assured her possessed every special blessing that could be bestowed upon it—that this special rosary said on a special day in a special church would obtain certain relief for the suffering souls in Purgatory.

"Won't it do if I say the prayers without the beads?" she asked.

"No," he answered, with the solemnity of a judge. "You understand there are special indulgences attached to this rosary through its having been espe-

cially blessed." She did not understand, and took the gift reluctantly as the old man hastened away.

"But I don't want it," she explained to the Cardinal, leaning her head on her hand and looking into his eyes with indomitable determination.

"Why?" he asked, handling the little black rosary.

"Perhaps you'll be angry!"

"That might be very good for you."

"I think not," she said, and disconcerted him with a look of anticipatory pain.

"Come," he said, "why don't you want the rosary?"

She became meditative.

"Why," she answered slowly, "you know one day at the convent they were praying for the souls in Purgatory, and I thought suddenly that if Monsieur Paul were there it wouldn't benefit him to be let out too soon; and then I thought—I thought that it must be the same for all the rest."

"You are a shameless little heretic!"

The Archbishop moved to his seat, and she noticed that a sad expression replaced the one of amusement. For two or three moments he said nothing.

"Tell me, Father," she questioned eagerly. "What is it? I don't mind."

"I have received a letter from your home," he answered, without raising his head.

"Tiens! Is that all?"

"It isn't a very nice letter."

She sat down in a chair and took off her hat. She had never taken off her hat before, and he realized how agitated she really was through all her heroic effort at unconcern. He noticed the irrepressible

brown curls, and the little white parting that separated them, the way they nestled down round the pink of the tiny ear; and the man of him recoiled from reading her the shameless letter he had received from her natural protectors. He read it over again before handing it to her.

"Our daughter," it ran pompously, "who is our daughter no more, left her home but a few days before the one fixed for her marriage with a gentleman of honour and position. For three weeks we heard nothing of her whereabouts or movements. You explain that she is now under your protection—since April 30th. Where was she before? 'Ill in a strange lodging-house.' That reads quite well, but not well enough for the parents this heartless child has dishonoured. To take her back would be to insult her young sister and create a scandal among all our friends. As to portioning her, we consider she has entirely forfeited all rights to such a claim. Under your Eminence's distinguished patronage she will, no doubt, be able to earn a living, and perhaps become an honest girl."

"Let me see it," said Jeanne, and he handed it to her. She read it slowly through.

"They needn't have said quite all that, need they? Of course, it was annoying for Monsieur Paul, and they haven't any money to send me; but you mustn't mind," she said, noticing his look of pain. "I've got you, haven't I?" And she put her hand on his. The tears started to the Cardinal's eyes. She was such a little thing, so young.

"Poor child!" he answered gently.

"Jeanne-Marie, you must do something. The little Sisters you are with can't afford to keep you; they can hardly afford to keep themselves."

She closed the book in her hand with a bang.

- "What shall I do?"
- "That's the difficulty—you are absolutely incapable of doing anything."
 - "Oh dear! but if you say I must-"
- "Well, that's what I hope. If we can make you understand that you must, perhaps you will try—try to be like every one else——"
 - "I want to be a nun," she said deliberately.
- "You can't be a nun to make your living, you know."

She flushed to the roots of her hair. "It is not that." Then she turned to the window and remained silent for several moments, a sweet serious look rising from the depths of her child eyes. "I want to be like you," she murmured—"really good," she added solemnly, so that the great Churchman had to laugh. They discussed further the question of her taking a place. On her next visit she received somewhat dolefully the news that an excellent situation had been procured. "They are charming people," he explained; "you ought to get on very well, and it might lead to other things. You have simply to teach several children French. It will be quite simple."

- "I have never taught," she demurred.
- "I know," he answered, "but you must try."

The lessons led to nothing, however. Jeanne-Marie was discharged after three months. She had been discovered one morning sitting on the table, a

copy-book improvised into a crown upon her head, and the little ones on their knees before her, reciting some odd formula in English. No one had succeeded in discovering from these children what the game had been: all that could be drawn from them was the remarkable statement that they played it regularly at lessons. Playing regularly at lessons struck the good parents as hardly what they employed a French governess for, and she was regretfully discharged. The children cried, but their companion had to go.

The Cardinal was much distressed.

"What can I do with you?" he complained. "Don't you know that London is over-crammed with young people out of places—that such lessons are most difficult to get—that they are all fighting, these several millions of people about us, for work—for work," he reiterated bitterly; "many for bread."

"I wish to be a Carmelite," she said; then noticing that this remark had no effect, she went on, "I am very sorry. I thought in London every one was rich. You seem so rich!" she cast a look at his gorgeous robes. "Are there really many who want bread? You do look rich; but perhaps you're not," she added tentatively. "We might sell a lot of those things; don't you think so? It would be rather nice." She contemplated for a moment the furniture around her, then exclaimed suddenly, "Let's have a sale here and a feast. Oh, it would be like in the olden times!" She stood up, and a flush of radiant excitement illuminated her young countenance. "Let us give a great, great feast, you and I, to all the poor."

Was he a dreamer, the Cardinal? Did the spirit of the young priest of long ago come to him now

amidst the pomp and grandeur of his palace? Did his own youth hold the heart-strings of the world-wise man for a brief moment? Could he tear off the Prince's robes of the Governing Church, and as the Christ of Galilee go out and minister to His poor, that he sat quite still and seemed to forget his little pupil? He raised his eyes at last and smiled. "It would be a fairy-tale feast if we succeeded in feeding them all. We might sell the whole palace, you know, and it wouldn't go very far, little Carmelite!"

"She wants to sell me up," he explained some days later to the good secretary. "What do you think of that? I tried to point the moral of her own indolence by describing the want of the masses, and she took up the cudgels for the masses against me. She has determined to become a nun," he added after a moment.

"I am glad," said the secretary.

Incongruously enough, the Cardinal was displeased. "She is so young," he said desperately.

"That is hardly a disqualification."

"I know, I know—but I doubt her vocation. It's the dream of a child. What mightn't she do in the world with her indomitable courage?"

"She is heretically inclined, she is safer immured," said the old man quite solemnly, turning an inquisitorial eye on his Eminence. His Eminence laughed, which enhanced the gravity of his companion's demeanour. "Nonsense," the Cardinal said; "she's ignorant, and she likes to understand. You make her swallow things whole, and then object that she chokes, my good father."

"The Holy Church never chokes."

The Archbishop made no answer to this solemn assurance.

"She is not strong enough," he went on. "She never complains, but I have seen it. The shock of leaving her home was so much greater than any of us have realized. She was so grateful—she never thought of complaining. She loved her little sister too. She can hardly speak of her without tears in her eyes. I have watched the hope die out of her child's face, and seen the brave, trustful strength rise like a purifying tide over the wastes of despair. Poor little girl! And yet what an inconsequent child-thing she is! Can you see her in the long rough draperies of the habit?"

"She may not stay."

"She will stay," he answered, then strode out into the large reception-room to give audience to the never-ending claimants on his time, his influence, and his charity. He looked wearily into their submissive eyes, and thrust his ring to be kissed with a quick, almost rough movement. The little rebel would never be among them. She would never suggest again that they should sell the palace to feed the poor. "A bazaar-you want my name. Well, you know, there are so many. For the poor? No; to buy candelabra for the N- Mission? You want to get candelabra and curtains for the sacristy door. I never give my name for bazaars, you know. Well, Father Stanislaus, how's the building? Another two thousand pounds wanted to put on a steeple? The Duke has subscribed two thousand already? Don't build a steeple. Ah, you must have a steeple? It's an ugly thing, you know—insignificant—"

A little old lady given to charitable works caught the word and could not grasp its meaning relative to steeples. Steeples had always struck her as most important erections. "What do you think his Eminence meant?" she asked her next-door neighbour. Her next-door neighbour didn't know.

At home she sought out the word in the dictionary, and found, "Insignificant: destitute of meaning." "Why, yes," meditated the little lady, "what a lot of things there are in the world that are important and yet destitute of meaning!"

* * * * *

Six months elapsed, and Jeanne-Marie received the habit. The little girl rebel had entered one of the strictest orders that Christendom has founded for the worship of God by women. The young face looked out from the white swathing and heavy veil with the same quiet, restful expression. The austere life failed to mature the child-woman. She went about the strange duties of night vigils, long penances, and the making of the Holy Wafer for consecration with the perfect simplicity and cheerfulness of a worldling busy over household responsibilities. She sought out with strange persistence the hardest work to do, and went through it all so gaily that the paler, frailer sisters clung to her company for the sunshine she brought them.

The Prioress, who was something of a scribe, wrote to the Cardinal—

"We sometimes think that to her it is all a wonderful play which she is acting, as little children do with such determined seriousness. Nothing seems to

daunt her courage, and we try her to the limit. The only favour she has asked is to be allowed to tend the flowers in the garden. Under her care they have thrived wonderfully. The odd child talks to them when we are not noticing. She says that each is planted in honour of a saint; but in questioning her we find that they are alternately dedicated to your Eminence and St. Francis of Assisi. She knows the life of the great St. Francis by heart, and has a will to preach to the birds, I think."

"She can preach to men," he mused. Recollection made his suave face pucker up into a smile. Had they been right in letting this child enter such an order? The solemn countenance of his secretary appeared at the door in a kind of answer to his question. Why, yes; the good father was quite certain.

* * * * *

"The Cardinal is here. He wishes to see you."

The look of pleasure that leapt into the girl's face faded as she divined the anxiety latent beneath the Prioress's calm demeanour.

- "What is it?" she questioned eagerly.
- "The Cardinal will explain."
- "Is it Monsieur Paul?" she asked, and all the light died from her face.

The Prioress did not answer.

"But I am safe here," Jeanne continued hurriedly.

"They cannot take me away. Ah! you will not let them take me? Why, of course, how absurd of me!—you say it is the Cardinal. He won't let him. But I don't understand—why? Ah! you will keep me, won't you? You will keep me?"

"No one can take you, little daughter, against your will. Come, the Cardinal is waiting."

Nearly two years had passed since Jeanne had seen her good friend and counsellor, and now, as she looked into his eyes, recollections of the old days spent with him came back to her, and it seemed it was only yesterday that they had sat side by side and plodded through the books of instruction, chatting at intervals about all the foolish things that had come uppermost in her head. How good, indeed, he had been to her!

To him she appeared a little more formal, a little more of the woman. There was something of an added dignity in her bearing—yet, withal, she was wholly the Jeanne-Marie of his adopted pupil—still the child under the heavy draperies of the Carmelite habit, and he realized how difficult his mission would be, the mission he had taken upon himself out of a sudden sense of pity for the pale-faced foreigner who seemed to combine in his composition impossible extremes of weakness and strength, levity and pure aspiration.

Monsieur Paul de Mancelle, on hearing of the flight of the girl to whom, in a few days, he was to be married, had at first remained obstinately incredulous, declaring that she would return; but as the days wore away and no news of her was received, he departed suddenly for a tour through Italy, enjoying, his friends declared, a mood alternating between violent anger and sullen despair. He came back, however, to his native city, apparently heart-whole, at a moment when the deputy's financial affairs were at an irretrievably low level and bankruptcy imminent.

The discarded lover interposed, and, at a great personal sacrifice, re-established the fallen financier's honour. On hearing the news that Mdlle. Jeanne was entering a convent, he had declared he was indifferent. "She might become a nun or what she would, he did not care." Six months later he left Paris for London, and sought out the Cardinal. After several visits he had succeeded in extorting a promise from the great prelate to obtain him an interview on the grounds of a right the Church herself recognised—the right of the lover to whom the girl's word had been given.

"My child," said the Cardinal gently, "I have obtained permission for you, from the Reverend Prioress, to speak with Monsieur Paul de Mancelle. I have done this, which will seem to you unpardonable, because I know you to be brave and strong, because I want you, before taking the solemn vows which will tie you for ever to this holy life, to be quite, quite sure that what you choose is God Almighty's will of you; and that you have not wronged another soul. Ah, my child, do not shrink! He is one of God's, too. He only claims a hearing. Your word was once given to him. Of him personally you have never asked it back."

"I will ask him," she answered proudly. All the colour faded from her face. "You are right."

"I cannot advise you, my child," continued the Cardinal, "because I want you of your own free will to choose."

"Choose? There is no question of choice!" The little novice's voice was unrecognisable.

"Every day we have to choose," he said sadly, "not

only between right and wrong, virtue and sin, the wide path and the narrow; but the greatest of all trials, of all human difficulties, the choice of the cross roads when we are ignorant of the way. God helps us when we seek Him then; but do not think we have found Him when inclination weighs too much in the scale!"

"I do not know what you mean," she answered despairingly. "I do not know what you mean. Why won't you speak out? It's insupportable. You have gone over to them then. I did not think I should have to bear that—but it's not true. Ah! it's not true—this is a terrible dream. What is it? Surely I have not lost you, too—I loved you so—I thought you almost divine. That was foolish of me, wasn't it?" Her fingers tightened over the crucifix on her rosary, and there was a silence. "What is it you want me to do?" she said at last. "Of course I'll see this demon if you wish it."

* * * *

A few minutes, and she was behind the grating which separated her from the visitors' parlour. Her veil was down, and the fair-bearded man, with weary eyes and sensitive dilating nostrils, caught nothing of the countenance he had longed for eighteen months to see. Only the sweet little voice reached his anxious ears. A sudden passionate rage at his own powerlessness to break away these hideous bars and take the human girl from this awful, inhuman prison-house, almost unmanned him.

"Can I not even see you?" he said pleadingly.

"It is against our rules, Monsieur Paul." She

remembered his ears, and was glad she could not see him. "You have something to say to me," she continued coldly.

- "I have nothing to say. I have come to take you away."
 - "There are bars, Monsieur."
 - "But you will come?"
 - "I shall not come!"
- "You fled from home because you were afraid of me; I have driven you to this; I shall save you from it."
- "You are entirely mistaken, Monsieur; I have always desired to be a nun. I was afraid of you, and I ought to have apologised to you for going away in such a hurry; but really, you were all so insupportable, it was impossible for me to consider politeness. But my vocation has nothing to do with you."
 - "You are happy, then?"
 - " Perfectly."
- "I have no right to say anything if you are happy. Marie hoped you would come back. She is not very happy, poor child. They are very poor now, you know. I did what I could."
 - "My father was bankrupt, then?"
 - "No; we averted that."
 - "You saved him?"
 - " Mademoiselle!"
 - "You saved him?"
 - "It was nothing."
 - "How much did you pay for him?"
- "You would not understand figures. I was saying---"
 - "Will you tell me?"

"I cannot quite remember. They want to marry her, it seems."

"Marie?"

"Yes, she is like you in that; only, poor little thing, she cries instead of running away. Her proposed husband is fat, and drinks—I thought she might come and live with us. She thought so too. We might have found her some one more suitable. She is too young to marry just now; but what can we do? There is no one to protect her from her step-mother. She's an appalling woman, your step-mother. I shouldn't be surprised if she turned the child out one day."

The curtain was drawn hurriedly across the grating, and Monsieur de Mancelle found himself alone. A sickness crept over him as he realized that the long-desired interview was over—that he had said nothing that mattered—that the little girl he had loved so recklessly he had lost for ever.

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Jeanne stood before the Cardinal, and the child of her seemed to be gone for ever. "I will marry Monsieur Paul," she said; "only take me away quickly, lest I should regret—lest I should be weak." She took off the rosary that hung at her side, and lovingly laid it on the table, holding the heavy crucifix for a moment in her hand. "I thought I had given Him everything," she said softly; "I did not know." Then she turned and looked out of the narrow window which gave a view of stretching green grass and beyond a formal bed of white lilies and purple fleurs-de-lis. She had planted the lilies for Francis

of Assisi and flags for the Cardinal. Two Sisters were standing discussing the flowers—they were talking of her—she guessed they were talking of her out there in the sunny garden; she moved her eyes away and met the gaze of the Cardinal.

"Cest assonmant! Mais enfin vous comprenes: I shall marry Monsieur Paul!"

The Decree of the Anti-Grundy Club

The Decree of the Anti-Grundy Club

"WHATEVER he is, his work is superb."
"We all appreciate his work."

It was a casual meeting of the Anti-Grundy Club. The members had just finished lunch, and were drinking black coffee from very dainty little cups, and smoking gold-tipped cigarettes, though they were not men, nor even ladies given to manly affectations, but very beautifully dressed, and, on the whole, goodlooking young women, varying from the ages of two-and-twenty upwards to twenty-seven, or there-The windows were wide open, and a soft breeze wafted in from across the little square, just catching at the tops of the tall elms, and turning the edges of the leaflets. One of the guests had moved from the table, and sat sideways in the embrasure of the window, turning her head every now and then to catch a glimpse of the patches of blue sky beyond the red-roofed houses on the other side. The assembly addressed her as Joe, and sometimes as President. During the meal the Academy had been discussed. and the merits of the various younger painters. usual, the vote was unanimous as to the superiority of Godfrey Wills's work over that of all his contemporaries. From the painting, the criticism fell to the painter, and the popular favourite was treated with

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little mercy by these daintily-attired and fastidious worldlings.

"I object to Godfrey Wills because he will chaperon himself; not even the Club, I think, seems able to cure him of the weakness," murmured Mrs. Blake. The Club laughed.

"Isn't it an idiosyncracy of the modern man!" said her neighbour.

"What a very odd creature this modern man is!"

Every one turned expectantly to the speaker, with the anticipation of something good to come visibly expressed on their countenances.

"We hear a good deal about the modern woman," she went on, "but no one yet has pilloried that much queerer and unsexed person, the male that is her correlative. Fortunately, neither of these persons is in the majority." She paused, and gave a little laugh. "I have no sympathy, myself, for that type of our sex who apes her brother; yet I think whatever the so-called new woman has taken to herself of the useful and convenient habits of men, she has not ceased to be pre-eminently a woman. Never till this century were such nurses as we have now, and mothers who care personally for their children," she laughed again, "nor has taste in dress and the art of cooking been carried to so high and economical a point. But it seems the modern man, on the other hand, has entirely put aside his own attributes, and taken to himself those feminine qualities which have been discarded by the most womanly of women as useless to either of the sexes. He chaperons himself with no virtue to protect. He is a dandy with no excuse for his dress-since the notice of women is

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highly displeasing to him. He is garrulous without gracious speech, affected without good manners, and, like our maiden aunts of the eighteenth century, lives in dread that a bold inamorata will convey him off willy-nilly to the altar."

A shout of appreciation greeted the end of this quaint analysis.

"Your description is delightful, Lady Alex," said the President. She hesitated for a moment as she glanced across the room. A faint colour rose to her cheeks. "There are qualities in your Type which we all recognise; but I can't admit that Wills has any one of them."

"My dear President, most London men are a little tainted; really nice persons get taken that way. Godfrey Wills is morally certain that every eligible or ineligible girl he meets loves him desperately."

"Well, they do rather-don't they?"

"Of course they do! We all do; but we love lots of people!"

"It isn't his merit, but our capacity," murmured a very pretty little person in a corner. "I know he lives in deadly fear of me!" She looked so dainty in her ribbons and chiffons—her tiny feet peeping from under a mass of lace frills—that the idea of a male being in fear of her was irresistibly comic.

"You know perfectly well that he grovels to you," began Mrs. Blake, when the door was thrust suddenly open, and a handsome young woman came in like a gust of wind, and threw a smiling "How do you do?" to the room. "Ladies and President," she said with good-tempered zeal, "I propose that Godfrey Wills should be asked to retire from our club."

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"What has he done?" demanded the President.

"Is he in love—under the rule of some formidable female?" queried she of the pretty feet.

"Very much under the rule of a female!"

"Who?" asked the Club unanimously. The President only was silent. She had turned her face again to the window.

"We can't censure a member because he's in love, you know." murmured Lady Alex.

"That depends on the lady—what if it's Mrs. Grundy?"

"Oh, that's quite unpardonable!" exclaimed the President. She was laughing. "Ladies, we must sit upon this question."

"What's he been and gone and done?" queried a hitherto silent soul.

"I don't know what he hasn't done in infringement of our rules," answered the new-comer. was the climax." She stopped, then proceeded with much mock solemnity. "I was at the private view of the New. I happened to tumble up against Mr. Godfrey Wills in the crush, and asked him to take me up to tea. 'Wouldn't it be conspicuous?' he said. I explained that I had no notion of the meaning of the word relative to the occasion. 'Compromising,' he answered. I remarked that such an expression was treason from the lips of an Anti-Grundyite. The object of the Club was generally to compromise everybody in public, that special individuals might be at peace in private. 'You are a special individual,' he said boldly. 'But I am in public, therefore I'm everybody and anybody.' 'Your vows?' I said. 'I was brought up to respect Mrs.

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Grundy; you must forgive me if I occasionally rise in her presence, though I am devoted to the Club,' he replied."

" Well?"

"He did not take me to tea!"

"Did he take any one else?"

"Certainly not; he persistently remained by my side. I said why not upstairs as well as here? 'It's most public here,' said he. 'That's right—is it not?'"

"I should like Mr. Wills to propose to me," exclaimed one of the listeners somewhat hotly, "just that I might have the pleasure of refusing him." The remark was irrelevant, but appreciated. Comments enough followed.

"It would be irresistibly pleasing to refuse Godfrey Wills. One's life would be for ever coloured with the dignity of such a triumph!"

"He might become really nice if repulsed a sufficient amount of times."

"I'd refuse him," said the little lady in the corner, with a very vigorous puff of her cigarette. It sounded as if she were proposing to resign a crown.

The idea became contagious. Every member doggedly averred that nothing would induce her to accept the spoilt favourite.

"Would you sign?" asked a sceptical member. Yes, the Club would sign. It was the Club's duty to stand against Godfrey Wills, who was a member, and yet was daily breaking the rules by submitting to Mrs. Grundy and generally behaving like the worst of modern men. The President was called upon to draw up the decree, and the members proceeded to take oath on the matter.

"He'll never give any of us a chance, so one may just as well be on the dignified side," said a somewhat reluctant young lady.

"How do you do, Joe? Am I to congratulate you?"

The President was alone in the drawing-room as Mrs. Caversdale rustled in. "On what?" she asked.

"You surely haven't refused him?"

"Whom?"

"Godfrey-Godfrey Wills."

"Well, no, I haven't—I haven't had the chance—but I am bound in honour, you know."

Mrs. Caversdale looked oddly at her companion, and then said, "What the dickens do you mean? I suppose you know that my nephew is in love with you?"

"I know nothing of the kind, Mrs. Caversdale. Mr. Wills, it seems, according to friends, is about to marry every one. It must be pretty tiring for him—but it's worse for us."

"Joe, don't talk nonsense. Godfrey was lunching with me yesterday. You know he always tells me everything. He asked me if I thought you'd kave him. I said I thought you would. He left me saying he was going on to you. Of course——"

A crimson flush leapt over the President's face, and her lips trembled. "He didn't come, you see, Mrs. Caversdale," she said with a laugh; "Wills has never taken the slightest notice of me—on the whole he has snubbed me." She turned her eyes away. "I have a great admiration for his work. When I admire people's work I am always a little devoted

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to them, you know,"—she flushed again—"but it had never dawned upon me that he could care for me." Her eyes were a little moist when she ended: "It's quite absurd, isn't it? . . . Have some more tea?"

As Mrs. Caversdale left, Mr. Godfrey Wills came in.

The President was in disgrace.

The President had broken her oath.

The President had betrayed them.

Perfidious President!

The announcement of her engagement to Mr. Godfrey Wills had been duly digested by the members of the Anti-Grundy Club. They determined to call her to account. What amusement would they not get by hauling the President into the witness-box of their little court! She was a shameless deserter, and she should be deservedly pilloried for their entertainment. The details of the engagement flew round the Club. The little crowd displayed no want of wit, so that on the appearance of the unhappy young woman a volley of sarcasms fell upon her unshrinking head. Order was called, and the mock trial commenced. A quaint and witty speech was made by Lady Alex in favour of the culprit, but the odds were against her. The President had plainly committed a breach. She was clamorously ordered to retire from the Presidency.

She arose at last, and said, with assumed gravity, "Ladies, I deny the charge. I did not accept Mr. Godfrey Wills, and I refuse to resign." Thereupon she turned and withdrew from their midst.

" Preposterous!" said the Club, and much wagging

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of tongues ensued, when the President's pretty head appeared at the door again, crimson with a sweet shame, and the very devil twinkling in her eyes.

"I proposed to him—ke accepted me," said she

and disappeared.

"Princess Cesarini"

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"Princess Cesarini"

I SAW her first as I was walking along a white road that led from the old city of Lucca to the Bagni. How tired I was! During the long hours of my tramp I had met but little traffic-white oxen slowly dragging loads-slowly, not because of their burden, but from that natural passive dignity that will accept the yoke yet will not be lashed to servitude—and peasant women, fine creatures like the oxen, mountain bred, carrying their boots upon their heads, and singing mournful songs with placid faces. Fate, as the yoke, must be borne, but they would pay no toll of fear. The river swept on my right, in its wide bed of grey stones, like a great blue serpent threading through the hot land; and far before me were the purple Apennines luring the traveller to their fresher heights.

She passed, and the dust flew from the horses' feet all about me. How divine and strange and beautiful she was, and so young! Her dusky hair formed a soft halo round her white face under the wide-brimmed hat with its great plumes—a face like a flower. Her gown—I noticed her gown—shimmered green, and round her throat was entwined a tiny chain with a turquoise heart attached. She passed so near me I might have touched her, and looked at me with

grave, wondrous eyes, the colour of the deep sea. Some one else was in the carriage—a slight figure in grey. I had no thoughts for her companion.

It was night when I reached the Bagni. flies hovered in the air, and the dark cypresses about the villa gardens looked black in the shadowy blue of an Italian night. I heard there that the Princess Cesarini had arrived that afternoon—the illustrious and bountiful Princess, the beloved of the poor. Then I knew that I had seen the Princess, and that I loved her-I, the poor student, the wanderer through foreign cities, loved the great Princess. I went next day to the Casino, having come only to seek the She was there, and all the people turned to look at her. I asked of one near, "Who are those ladies?"—just for the joy of hearing her name spoken. "'Tis the Princess Cesarini and her companion," said the bystander. Her companion was old. and her clothes looked shabby. I thought-she is poor and dependent, expatriated perhaps even as I. vet what would I not suffer to be for one brief hour in her shoes!

When they had gone I stole away and climbed up the mountain side. The blood surged like torrents of fire in my veins, and my heart beat. I cursed the fate that had made me as I was, then blessed the Maker who had created her so fair. I lay down with my face near the grass, and the beetles and strange winged things hummed in my ears, and the birds flapped low, not noticing I was there, and far below at my feet wound the river, and all about me were the mountains. I whispered her name to the blades of grass, to the sweet heavens, and down the shadowy

valley, and laughed to myself. Then I lay quite still and watched the coming of dawn, and I knew there was no hope.

Every day she went for a drive; every day I went to the foot of the steps that led down from the terrace garden and watched her mount the old barouche. Every evening I waited there to see her come home. On rare occasions she would turn her eyes to mine with a little pensive look of recognition, of wondering humour: then the universe was ours!

Once it happened that my Princess came down to the foot of the steep steps before the carriage had come. She was dressed all in white, and on the hem of her gown were embroidered little bunches of wild roses. She seemed not to see me, and looked long up the winding road. I saw a man was approaching, whereat my heart stood still with sullen rage; and she, as if she had read my thoughts, cast a quick glance of gentle sweetness that rebuked the angry man of me to shame.

Then the days flew—winged days, for on each I saw my Princess. What mattered if she were walking with him, driving with him, sitting in the terraced garden with him, if she remembered to turn her head, whilst he was speaking, to look at me? . . . I never dreamed of the end. How should I? Yet it came swift and sure, and I was left desolate. On that evening she stole to the terrace wall and looked down at me where I stood in the road far below her, and I saw there were tears in her eyes. A cry broke from me, but she put her finger on her lips, and I knew I must not speak. He was there in the terraced garden. She remained quite still, then suddenly

plucked a crimson flower from the edge of the crumbling wall, and threw it to me as she turned away.

She had gone next day—my Princess had gone, and I was alone.

I came across the little old lady one morning, on the river bed, seated in the shadow of an immense boulder. She was sketching. I had crept down there among the rocks and stones to get near the blue thread of water that had narrowed through the heat of the summer to a serpentine line. It flowed the way she had gone!

"How can you do it?" I said recklessly. "How can you do it?"

She looked up at me, at first a little startled; then she smiled. "Oh, it's you, is it?"

- "Yes, madam, it is I-or rather my body."
- "What is it you don't wish me to do?"
- "Draw so dreadfully . . . when she has gone too!"
 - " Who has gone?"
 - "The Princess Cesarini."
 - "You know the Princess?"
- "Who can be here and not know her? Didn't she make the whole world lovely? Look how hideous it is now? The dried-up river—the perpetual chestnut woods—everything blatant, positive, colourless with a blaze of raging heat—and you painting it!"
 - "Ah! so you know the Princess!"
- "Know her! Doesn't every poor woman bless her name, and every child smile at the sound of it? Is she not their good angel? How could I not know her?"

"It is very easy to do the good angel when one is rich."

" Madam!"

"Why, yes, when there is no need of any self-denial."

"I think it horrible of you, blasphemous of you, to speak so of your benefactor."

"Why benefactor? Money is exchanged for service, you know—service for money. We are apt in this world to always consider the benefit bestowed by the employer; sometimes it is all the other way."

"It may be sometimes, madam," I said in a great rage. "In this case I know it is not." And I rose to go, only that something in her shabby clothes and sad face made me hesitate.

"Why don't you follow her?" she said irrelevantly.

I turned and looked at the blue water at our feet. "I can't," I said; "I have no money."

"Would you go if you had it?"

"Yes, I would go."

"If you had only a little?"

"I would go if 'twere only enough to follow where she had been, and dream my footsteps were treading where hers had fallen."

"What if I give it you?"

"You give it me?"

"I will give it you!"

"You are mocking me, madam!"

"Indeed I will give it you."

A sudden madness surged through my being.

"I will pay you back—I swear I will pay you back!"

"Yes, you shall pay me back."

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There followed a long silence. I thought I had been dreaming, for it did not seem it could be true, when she said suddenly: "After all I don't think I'll let you have the money." Then I turned away in sick anger. "How hateful—how extraordinarily hateful you are!" said I; "I believe you are a witch!"

"Come, that's not polite."

I walked away, and sat down on a great stone. Yes, surely she was a witch. There she remained, peeping at me every now and then as she sketched. She was a hundred at least, and her horrid hand was like a piece of parchment. If I hadn't been a man I should have strangled her—for once I wished I were a woman. She had filled my cup up with hope that the bitter might taste the more bitter.

"You silly, passionate boy," she said at last, "come here!"

I took no notice.

"Come here!" she repeated, suddenly standing up. Somehow I had to go. She was so old, and the stones were not safe walking among. She leant heavily on my arm as we went over the rough way in silence to the steps that led up from the river bed to the road. The Princess Cesarini's carriage was waiting. How my heart beat! Her carriage! Ah! why had she gone?

"Get in!" said my companion after she had seated herself.

" I—I—-

"Get in."

I got in. We drove through the village. Neither of us spoke. I felt her eyes were fixed on me. All the folk we met uncovered, and the children ran to

the doors of the cottages. "How she is loved!" said I suddenly.

" Who?"

"The Princess, of course! Don't you notice how the people recognise her equipage, and bow even to——"

"To me, you mean, you funny creature! You are amazingly impertinent." She smiled very sweetly, but sadly too, and turned her eyes away as if her thoughts had strayed on to weightier matters. I lost sight of the shabby little woman, the old grey clothes and wizen face, and I saw a great lady, with a great heart—a soul that commands a bending of the knee from all her kind. Then I knew—it suddenly flashed upon me, so that I felt cold and trembled with shame. I was driving with the Princess Cesarini. I must have turned pale, for she said:—

"She is a princess really, my dear boy."

"It is not that," said I.

"A real princess," she continued, "only she is very poor—like you—and she has no title. She brings the sunshine into an old woman's life, and in return the old woman gives her pretty clothes, a little gold, and a home. See, the country will be beautiful again soon, for she is coming back to-morrow. You shall meet her."

"Princess!" said I. But I could not speak; something swelled up in my throat.

"Those Other People"

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"Those Other People"

WE had quarrelled—I don't know what about; neither of us quite knew, I think. One of those unexplained quarrels when we thought mean things of each other without any cause, and then justified the other's condemnation by meaner actions. We were polite to stupidity, and our conversation was interlarded with the poorest satire in which we exulted as displaying the sharpness of our wit and the indifference of our feelings. We ruthlessly stabbed, and wondered every time at the other's cruelty with a renewed sense of surprise, whilst pondering on a return thrust likely to prove more hurtful. Every day we seemed to be growing farther from the possibility of a reconciliation, till at last we became quite friendly in our enmity. We ceased to be personal, and only discussed outside matters. Our hearts had solidly frozen-we, who had loved each other so much—there was no longer warmth enough even for satire. We ate our meals silently together in the great hall of the queer old Inn of Montenero which was built high up on the rocks above the swift river coiling about their base two hundred feet below, an impregnable stronghold in the old times of the border wars, and now but a hostelry for travellers crossing the wild forest lands that stretched for miles

to the horizon. I had come to meet the Count, my father, on his way south, but he had been detained, and Ugo had declared he would not leave me in the desolate old castle till a safer protector than my female attendant should arrive. I acquiesced—how willingly then, when my heart beat at the sound of his footsteps, and the gloomy halls seemed so mysteriously delightful whilst he was there! Things had indeed changed! Now I protested impatiently at the waiting. Would not my father soon arrive? Yet surely I dreaded his advent, which would mean our parting without ever a reconciliation.

He offered to ride to his encounter. I murmured, "He might if he wished," and turned away with my heart sinking into my toes. He did not go, however, and in this I found further cause for a display of ill-humour. He successfully retaliated, till I despised him with all my soul, and wondered how I ever could have thought him aught but a bear.

One day, as I strode angrily along the corridor, I encountered one of the guests I had not before noticed, though later I remembered that she had been about the inn for some days. She was a little person, not so much in height (she might have been as tall as myself) as in general effect: she *looked* little, and had the meanest countenance I had ever beheld. I took such a sudden dislike to the creature that I involuntarily drew my skirts aside as she passed. Later on in the day we both observed her at table in the company of a man. He was taller than she, yet had the same appearance of puny meanness. An impotent pugnacity marked the whole of his irascible physiognomy, the features of which were white and formless.

The two openly wrangled during the whole course of the meal, so that we could not help laughing at the ridiculousness of their behaviour. They bandied words on every conceivable subject. "Pray don't eat your soup as if you were fond of it," said she; "I hate to see people eat their soup in that way." "You hate every one but yourself," said he. "Perhaps I do, when every one has diminished to a you," she rejoined.

"How brutal they are!" murmured Ugo.

I laughed. Well, we were well bred in our quarrels, at any rate. Whatever we thought we took care to conceal in elaborate politenesses worthy, certainly, of better feelings. I think he understood what was passing through my mind, for he flushed a little angrily. Surely I did not mean to compare ourselves to these low creatures, whose deformed bodies seemed the index to their crooked souls. Whether I did or not, I succeeded in hiding further expression of my thoughts.

During the following days we became better friends; the discussion of these oddities made us forget something of our own rancour. We were pleased to condemn them, and philosophise on the uselessness of such beings on earth, their hideousness and evident discontent with life. Whenever we came across them our loathing increased. It happened one afternoon as we were seated on the parapet of the tower overlooking the dense stretch of wooded country to westward, and the silver serpent river, whose colour deepened with the setting of the sun, till the whole became a winding line of molten crimson at our feet, that a strange emotion, caused by the wondrous scene,

stirred us both. We turned to look at one another, when the sight of their vile figures intercepted our glances, and their querulous voices echoed in the great silence—petty, stupid, mean.

"I wonder that they can even think of such things," I said a little hotly, whereat an odd look crept into Ugo's eyes, which made me feel suddenly indignant. No doubt he was comparing me to them. How small of him to do that! How I disliked the way he dangled his feet against the parapet, his sword between his knees! I rose up and went in. could listen and enjoy the company of those horrible people if he liked, since he could not see any difference between them and me. I went disconsolately to my room, and watched from my window, and the tears crept into my eyes as I thought that surely Ugo and I would never be the same to one another again. Whilst I sat and dreamily pondered, the idea entered my head that this strange pair had come between us: that they had cast the evil eve on us—the evil eve! shuddered as a sense of the reality of the superstition assailed me. I recollected that they had appeared at the inn on the day of our quarrel. For seven days Ugo and I had been as strangers to one another, and they, they would sever us for all time. I leant out of my window, gazing down on the parapet beneath me, on which Ugo still sat. The horrible woman was looking at him even as I was, and the man mumbling to himself. I could have laughed out loud from very rage, for Ugo seemed to be mesmerised to the spot, bathed in the crimson light from the setting sun, with a look in his eyes that was not his, a look of one enthralled by evil. Far below, the river seemed a

way of blood, and the forest trees black and immutable. The idea of blood entered my soul, and with it a terrible thought. I shivered and closed the casement, then hastened away to escape from the gruesome notion that seemed to pursue me and take possession of my will.

I had done it. The awful idea had returned to me. In the late evening I stole through the dark corridor to her room, and all the way I laughed to myself, for the strange madness so possessed me that I had neither fear nor horror. Then I crept away down the stairs, and out into the open by the flowing river. There, as the cool air fanned my feverish face, I thought—I have done right: she was an evil, horrible thing who would harm us. But, Ugo! What will he think? Still, I said aloud, I am glad, I am glad.

"Why are you glad?"

I turned round with a little cry as Ugo came out of the darkness and joined me.

"I could not rest," he went on quite naturally, "so I came out here. I did not expect to find you," he continued, with no warmth in his tone, adding, "Those people got on my mind. I felt an irresistible desire to go and smother that brute—kill him. I wish I had; but somehow I hadn't the courage."

- " Ugo!"
- "What is it?" he said.
- " I have done it."
- " What ? "
- "I have killed her."
- "You are mad!"

"I have killed her," I repeated.

He remained silent, pale to the lips, then said hurriedly, "No one can possibly know you did it?"

" No—unless——"

" Unless?"

"He—he should divine."

"But he must die too!" He sprang away from my side, bitten by my madness. "Don't you see," he said, looking oddly, "such people must not exist; they are horrible, venomous worms; they are not human, they have the evil eye, they poison the earth."

I followed slowly, possessed by a strange calm. Of course it was quite right. The world must be rid of such extraneous beings. We cleansed our houses of all vile accumulations, we swept our streets, and burned every useless thing, killed nauseous insects and treacherous animals, exterminating all that was loathsome. Why did we stop at human vermin, and not purify the world too of such defilement? Then suddenly I stood still. Ugo, a few yards before me, was rooted to the ground, and, passing near, were those other people. Yes, she! I had failed, then. My stabs meant nothing. She could not be killed. Ugo, too, had failed! The blood in my veins turned cold with horror, and, like him, I could not move from where I stood.

At last he came up to me as one in a dream, and said, "We cannot kill them! Look! They are some evil spirits. Little one," he murmured tenderly, "come away, come away from here, it is a poisoned place. They may live for ever, but they shall not separate us. We were in their thraldom." Was it a dream? Ugo's arms were round me. "I love you, I

"THOSE OTHER PEOPLE"

love you!" he said; "I have been afraid to tell you, and they, they came between us; but we do not care—do we? You were so brave, braver than I, for you did not hesitate; but it was no use, we could not kill them."

Our arms were tightly entwined, nothing in the world could come between us now. Those gruesome people were but pigmies. What cared we? And we turned with a laugh towards them. Then we saw what was indeed stranger than anything that had yet happened at the old castle, for there under our very eyes they changed, and she became even as I was, tall and fair, and he as Ugo, brave and beautiful, till at last it seemed that they were we and we were they; then as the pale moon gleamed from out the clouds, and threw a flood of light across our path, we found that we were alone.

"It is not true!" I murmured. "I may have been like that, but not you." He coloured to his eyebrows. "The portrait of me was doubtless excellent," said he; "the other, of course, was a preposterous calumny."

But I don't think either of us cared very much, for we knew that as long as our hearts beat near one another's those other people could not find a way to come between us. And, in very truth, they were seen no more at Montenero. •

The Princess

Princess

To His Excellency Sir Alfred Milner, K.C.B., G.C.M.G. and to Anthony Hope Hawkins, Esq. Barristers-at-law (Jan. 17th, 1897)

PART I

I

PRINCESS had golden hair that covered her shoulders like a yellow shawl, and she was delightfully, childishlv beautiful. She lived with her father, Dr. Wells, and Boo, a little old lady, in a tall, solitary, crooked house on the edge of the moor. It had been written of her father that when he was not drunk he was asleep. The epigrammatic biography was descriptive without being wholly accurate. Wells had sober moments, moments when he received his patients. visited them, or shut himself up in a laboratory, and either cut up live creatures, so it was rumoured, or counted his money; for the weakness of the miser was no insignificant appetite with this crooked-souled man. He practised economy with a feminine nicety, and begrudged the smallest expenditure for the embellishment of his surroundings. The basement of his cheerless abode, however, was as charming and enlivening as the upper part was solitary and gruesome. Janet, a cheerful imp-a child of all work, perhaps sixteen in years—whose cheeks shone as the fire in the old-fashioned grate, and whose opinion

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on all matters was regarded with infinite respect by the household, presided there. She wore elasticside boots and a very stiff little print gown of im-From the kitchen a passage maculate cleanness. led into a sitting-room, the chairs and sofas of which were covered with shiny chintz patterned The carpet was florid, largely in ivv leaves. florid, and bunches of rose-buds decorated the wall paper up and down in diamond-shaped symmetry. A bow window to the ground opened immediately on an apple orchard of dwarf angular trees that threw shadows across the long grass. When this grass was cut by Jim, a lad, who worked in slavish fear of Janet, qualified by a secret admiration for her person, Princess was unhappy, whereat Janet, to make life smooth again, would come out between work times and erect wonderful thrones and couches and tombs of the grass, and with wreaths of cut daisies crown her young mistress, and throne her or bury her according to her whim. A low hedge, broken here and there, divided the orchard from the moor which stretched away on all sides in still undulating lines to the horizon, interrupted only on one side by a dark belt of fir trees, the confines of a dense wood. Boo said there was no more beautiful view in the world than that from the orchard in autumn time, when the sun was setting and the distant trees formed a purple streak across the moor; and Princess would gaze into the old eyes, that had a way of looking awry, and wonder if Boo weren't a fairy, and knew what all the other views in the world were like.

Boo was a little old lady Dr. Wells had in-

geniously procured, on the death of his young wife, as housekeeper, and governess to his daughter for the return of a "home." The little lady, who had at the time found herself penniless, through the unexpected liquidation of a company in which her small fortune had been invested, snatched at the advertisement, and in a refined diffidence omitted to allude to salary; in fact, to the amazement of the practitioner, she seemed to assume the attitude of "pray don't mention it"—and he appreciated her delicacy.—His child, then, would be brought up after all by a lady! His wife had been a lady; the consciousness of this fact always recalled to him his own station; recollection of certain butcher shops in Manchester never failed to accompany the thought His mother had not been a lady, and his wife's relations cut him consequently. At her death they had offered to take the little girl, and the irate man had laughed in their faces. "She is a Wells!" he remarked with malice, and they had departed in high dudgeon. That the son of a butcher should not be honoured by the patronage of the county was preposterous. They had disturbed themselves in the child's behalf as was their duty, but the matter was now ended. She might go to the bad—the only destination the good ladies could imagine attainable by one they themselves had discarded. Such a mésalliance had never before occurred in the family. The result would be inevitable. "She will certainly go to the bad," asserted Lady Henrietta. "Most positively," echoed the Hon. Mrs. Cleversdale. Lady Susan hesitated a moment and looked meditative. "Really I don't see what else she can do," she said at last.

- " If she doesn't do worse," said a sprightly mondaine.
- "Worse?" questioned the old ladies.
- "Why, yes! She might marry a butcher!"
- "Such a vagary is not likely to repeat itself in our family."
 - "But there's his family."
- "His family will make her a snob. Conscious of butcher blood, she will hate butchers."
 - " I am afraid there's no hope for her, then."
 - "I think not," said Lady Henrietta.

The doctor, however, swore an inward oath to rear the little girl in spite of them, as the daughter of her mother. He as studiously shut her off from the society of his own equals and relatives as he debarred her from communication with theirs. Miss Westoby was given absolute control, and the good lady had theories of education not to be despised. She spent wakeful nights on the consideration of a system for the bringing up of her new charge—she hurried to the future, stumbled on thoughts of literature, and determined in great haste that Princess should be reared on folk lore. She should be taught no cognisance of evil other than that described in those fat volumes where the unselfish are rewarded with lifelong felicity and the wicked with all the ills that could best teach the miscreants a wiser way of living. On learning that the starry eyed child was called Sarah she seemed distressed. "Sarah means Princess," she murmured, after a moment's re-"I think we might call her Princess!"

"By all means!" grinned the amenable parent, and as she looked up to thank him she caught an ugly expression on his already ugly enough countenance

that filled her with inward qualms as to the possibility of remaining under so gruesome a person's authority: he looked like a wizard, she thought, and inwardly dubbed him the wizard practitioner.

II

Thurston pulled up the white mare suddenly as he emerged from the wood on to the open moor, and breathed in the keener air that swept past from the far-stretching horizon. He had cantered through the interminable thicket with the idea of riding himself down-of escaping from the inner man. The sense of actual physical flight suggested a possible mental one, and his uncertainty whither this straggling path would lead him, intensified the feeling of eluding for the time an atmosphere that had sickened body and soul together. The house party at Hansdale had succeeded in being detestable only, and yet he had consented to remain another week. Mrs. Clive had promised to be interesting—she had seemed different to the others; but was it, as Lady Helen had suggested, because—— At any rate, Lady Helen was spiteful. He had found himself hating her and avoiding Mrs. Clive. Were there no honest women, then? No simple-hearted, straight women? He drew rein and laughed at his own bitterness. She had told him that such a medieval temperament as he possessed redeemed him from the commonplace. "Now a days one must either be twelfth century or twentieth; anything else was intolerably dull," she had insisted, and he had asked the distinction.

"One kills his faithless mistress and the other kisses her! You know we like sometimes to think we are worth killing."

A rabbit started from under the mare's very hoofs, and scampered across the open. He watched the little furred creature till it had disappeared, then found his eyes were resting on a tall building that stood up against the horizon like a grey tower. He walked his horse leisurely across the uneven ground, and approached the hedge that divided him from the queer-looking house-a hedge covered with a briar rose in full rich flower. Beyond was an apple orchard. He peered through the low branches to obtain a view of the dwelling place, that had so solitary an aspect, when a strange grassy mound diverted his attention. It was decked with wild flowers in stiff rows, and had the look of a recently formed grave. He slipped off his horse, attached the bridle to a branch, and stole through the gap in the hedge up to it.

Lying on a soft bed of freshly-cut grass was a young girl fast asleep; she had yellow hair that covered her like a shawl, and was clad in a muslin gown, sprigged with blossoms. Her pose was stiff as an entombed Assyrian, but she was asleep, fast asleep nevertheless, her lips parted just in the centre and her bosom rising almost imperceptibly with her breathing. She seemed to Thurston the freshest, loveliest, most living thing he had ever seen, and he smiled down upon her in incredulous wonder, when a voice near startled him by the astounding command—"Harise, Princess, a hundred years has passed—your true knight is here—he erwaits to take you in his arms," and the girl before him

scrambled to her feet, dazed and sleepy-eyed. a moment Thurston had encircled the warm little muslin-clad body in his embrace, and held her a tight prisoner. She struggled, and released herself with the funniest little oh! of expostulation, and then, as she eyed the stranger up and down for a moment, a flush of conscious maidenhood swept over her sweet little countenance. She threw up her golden head and marched off to a hillock of grass, on which she sat herself down. Thurston followed her with as much meekness as he could assume, and endeavoured to explain that he could not resist taking part in the little comedy. "You know," he pleaded eagerly, "the scene was set and my cue was given. Surely I am not to blame?"

"You were trespassing," she said, unappeased.

"Your hedge---"

"Of course it is broken — we — we—broke it, but——"

"Ah! you won't forgive me—only you know when I saw the briar rose and the hedge, and the tall castle beyond, and the Princess stretched in enchantment, I thought the old story after all had come true—"

Janet's eyes brightened: she had been standing a little way off, frightened at Princess's continued attitude of offence. "Oh, mister!" she said excitedly, was the beautifulist, realist, extraordinaryist Sleeping Beauty we have hever, hever done."

"I thought it was very nice," he said; "but I don't think the real Princess would tell her knight he was trespassing."

"But it's over now!"

[&]quot;Surely there was a wedding in the story I knew?"

he hazarded. The little serving-maid became meditative. "We might have that another time," she answered, with an appealing glance at her companion.

"Why, of course! When shall I come for the marriage?"

But Janet had to bethink herself of certain pies baking in the oven, so that she suddenly scampered off into the house. Then Thurston looked quite seriously at this strange, lovely, little lady he had found near the confines of the great wood, like a princess in a fairy tale, golden-haired and starry-eyed, and bedecked with wild flowers.

"You will forgive me, won't you?" he said.

She stood up, and raised her chin as she spoke with a very sweet arrogance: "I will forgive you, certainly -Janet is very fond of her games. She left me with instructions to sleep for a hundred years whilst she went to see after the cooking; when she came back I had really fallen asleep. It was so very comfortable, and she was so long. It is quite natural you should not have understood." Her little speech was quaintly formal, and Thurston wondered where she could have learnt to explain herself in such pretty English, though he still felt a tone of hostility. He watched her for some moments, and noticed that she, on her part, was gazing intently at his mare, whose white nose had as audaciously trespassed this side of the briar hedge as had her master, and the girl had a look in her eyes of hospitable appreciation of the offence.

"I do not feel forgiven at all," he stammered.
"What can I do?"

- "Would you do anything?" she asked suddenly.
- "Anything."
- "Would you let me ride on your horse just a little way?"
- "I am honoured," he said, with great gravity. "Can you ride?"
 - " No."
 - "Then I must hold you, or you will fall off."

She went eagerly to the side of the horse. He hesitated for a moment, then lifted her into the saddle and led the horse gently across the orchard. "You sit beautifully," he said. She flushed with pleasure. "What is your name?"

" Princess Wells," she answered simply.

"I dislike Oswald Thurston," said Lady Helen, as the few remaining guests gathered round the tea-table at Hansdale, all a little conscious that the most interesting male visitor had deserted them for the afternoon. "He has a way of chaperoning himself."

"It is an idiosyncrasy of the modern man," asserted their hostess.

- "It is his ideals he chaperons," said Mrs. Clive; "he is vulnerable on all other sides."
- "Oswald, or the modern man?" queried Lady Helen.
- "Oh, Oswald! The modern man has no ideals, and is quite invulnerable."

"You are in excellent spirits! Where have you been all the afternoon?" said Mrs. Clive at dinner to Lord Thurston.

- " I rode away to the end of the world."
- "And what did you find there?"
- "An enchanted place!"
- "Over the edge?"

He laughed. "Just over the edge!"

- "Then you had to come back without-"
- "Without my illusions."
- "Your illusions?"
- "Yes; I dropped them in the chasm between."
- "The loss of your illusions seems to have cheered you."
- "They were so ugly—selfish, morbid, disbelieving illusions. Illusions about the shallowness of the world, and the crookedness and heartlessness and artificiality of one's fellow-creatures."
- "I should like to lose those illusions," she said, with something of a sad note in her mellow voice. "So you found the world was very deep there at the edge—that you had only known the surface of things—the extraneous matter that rises to the top, such as——"
 - "Lady Helen," he interrupted.
- "A name for the world we live in here?" she answered.
 - "That some of you are drawn into."
- "You qualify your censure! Well, you know I like superficiality: it saves one from the mires of feeling where tragedy is apt to have its abode."
 - "That's an illusion you must lose."
- "Only by rising to the surface." She laughed.
- "And was your enchanted place inhabited?"
 "Enchanted places are never inhabited."
 - "Did you leave us all in the chasm between?"

- "Not you. Only something I had heard of you. I let it sink to the depths for ever."
- "Ah! that was a pity. You know things said of one are not necessarily untrue because they are unkind. You know," she continued, "I think all the same your enchanted place was inhabited."
 - "What can I say?"
 - "Tell me her name?"
 - " Janet."
 - " Janet?"
- "Yes, she cooks and washes and dreams about royal weddings."
- "That's enough! She's plebeian and a snob, an intolerable compound——"
- "Without the mixture Lady Helen could receive no homage."
 - "You are flippant. Your good humour lasts."
 - "With you—"
 - "What is she like?"
- "She has a dear little shiny face, a dear little nose that disdains the earth, and teeth like new milk, they are so white."
 - " Her hair?"
 - "As black as yours, and braided."
 - "You are infatuated with a barmaid!"
 - "Not a barmaid—but infatuated."
 - " I won't allow it."
 - "Will you come and see her?" he said.
 - "Don't ask me to call till after the ceremony."

Thurston laughed, and warmed at the thought of a ceremony. The golden-haired little stranger as a bride would surprise even Mrs. Clive to a bending of the knee.

But on the morrow something of his vision had faded. Surely his senses had befooled him? He had seen a wondrously pretty girl—that was all—in an orchard behind a briar hedge. The briar hedge had pricked his imagination. Moreover, he had been overdosed with the refined vulgarity of Lady Helen. An appetite for simple girlhood had enwrapped an ordinary little person, possessed of a sweet voice and an old-world manner, with attributes it desired. Undoubtedly on closer observation he would find the little Princess-whoever she was-as ordinary as the rest of the world. As to marrying her, well, that was ridiculous. He had surely not thought of matrimony! It would be amusing to see her again, nevertheless, if only to disillusion him from the absurd idea that—— He hesitated in his meditations, and found himself dwelling more keenly on the recollection of the scene in the little orchard. Yes; the absurd idea that she was purer, fairer, rarer than any woman he had ever seen in the world—the most desirable, the most adorable. He trampled on the superlatives with the sneer of the morning man awakened to the commonplaces of life by the necessity of having to shave.

Thurston remained three days at the mercy of those of the house party who had not left. He thrust the vision of the little girl beyond the wood into the background of his thoughts, where she kept him constant though unsubstantial company, and gave himself up to their pleasures with an amount of good temper that was unusual in him. He found it possible to be amiable even to Lady Helen. He sat under the fire of Mrs. Clive's witticisms with a

lazy appreciation that struck that good lady as ominous of some inward gratification that outward things had no power to reach.

"What is it?" she questioned. "You are in an abnormally good temper."

"I am always in a good temper."

"Naturally you are the most violent-tempered man I know."

"I'll be violent if you wish it."

"The offer is too good-natured to assure any result. I think I prefer you volcanic. You had better go back and fetch those 'illusions'; they made you disagreeable, but amusing."

"I'll go, though I can't promise to bring anything back, unless I find she's an illusion," he said to himself.

Accordingly, next day Mrs. Clive watched him mount the white mare and ride away—" to the end of the world," she mused, which, had she known it, was just as far as the briar hedge.

III

One morning Boo was summoned to the laboratory. What had happened that she should be asked to go into that dreadful place? She put down her book with a slight tremor of the old hands, and hurried away. It was a long climb to the top of the tall house, so that when Miss Westoby reached the hateful door she stopped to take breath and settle such scattered thoughts as had, on the surprising message, gone off on a tangent; but the door was immediately flung open by Doctor Wells himself. "Come in,"

he said hastily, and retreated to the window. She followed in meek submission, not daring to look either to the right or to the left. Might she not see poor live things stretched in agony, which she could not succour? There were no live things: nevertheless the might be was as substantial as a were to the imaginative little woman, and she suffered accordingly. On raising her eyes at last she found that his were averted, and an expression in them of strange gloating greed. The look shocked her: she followed hurriedly the direction of his glance; then the little woman turned pale and trembled. "Doctor," she exclaimed, "I assure you I know nothing of this!"

"I believe you," he said, showing his teeth with something of a grin. "I have called you up to beg you to continue to know nothing of it, but to keep your eyes open and report to me how matters proceed."

Miss Westoby was stunned. "I don't understand," she stammered; "you surely do not wish——"

"I certainly do wish—with proper supervision—I shall interfere at the right time. This is the third occasion. Of course they may have met before."

"The third time! But anything may happen if it is allowed to continue without my warning her. We cannot control things should they choose to go out of our sight," she pleaded.

- " Madam, you have brought up my daughter."
- "She is so innocent."
- "That will be her safeguard."
- "Good gracious me! but the man!" gasped the amazed little woman.
 - "I know my man," he said, and again showed his

teeth in a grim smile. Miss Westoby found herself, in spite of the terrible situation, pitying the transgressor.

"I will watch," she said in horrified acquiescence. "Might I venture to ask your purpose?"

He laughed. "You shall know my purpose in time. . . . She is coming in. Not a word to her!"

Boo was dismissed sorely conscience-stricken. She mitigated the pangs by a self-assurance that if things proceeded much further she would rescue Princess in spite of orders. The man should be challenged for an explanation of such clandestine proceedings. He was known to the doctor-that baffled her comprehension. How much did the wizard practitioner know of "his man"? Again she was inclined to pity. Nevertheless it was abominable behaviour on the stranger's part. She would certainly be on the alert, an untired sentinel. Never in the long years of this good little lady's administration of the doctor's household had she experienced such a shock to her sensibilities. The whole affair seemed incomprehen-Her little charge was doing wrong, innocently enough, of course, but wrong, and she was not to be allowed to stretch a hand to warn her. That seemed dreadful. She selected a window in an upper room, and day after day from her vantage point she saw Princess stroll out to a secluded end of the orchard and pass an hour, or half an hour, talking and walking under the briar hedge with a strange man. The practitioner she knew was watching from the laboratory overhead. The situation struck her as ridiculous, and then anew as grave. A sense of humour balanced

a somewhat stifling feeling of apprehension. She stretched an eager eye, whilst a smile at the girl's audacity twitched at the corner of the old mouth. Princess had not yet strayed from the line of vision. Thus far things went well, if things so ill could be called well. The two wandered about and talked and laughed, and the man seemed to take no advantage of their little girl presumably in his power.

"Oh! you strange, impossible girl! How often have I been here?"

"Seventeen times!" Princess said deliberately.

They were sitting under the hawthorn hedge in a little hollow, perhaps several feet deep. Banks of grass were on three sides of them; on the fourth the declivity continued down to a miniature valley in the orchard, where a tiny streamlet made a blue vein in the lap of the green; beyond, the verdure rose high, again relapsing into moorland as the trees grew sparse a little before reaching the straggling fence. Princess, if she looked upwards just behind her golden head, could see only a line of waving, monster grass, where now and then winged and crawling inhabitants would spy down in surprise at the human giants below. A butterfly would beat a wing suddenly against her cheek, or a big humming beetle flop on her lap to investigate the unusual phenomenon.

"And you won't let me come any more?" he said.

"No more," she said, and pulled off the head of a daisy. She seemed sorry about the decapitation, and caressed the white starry remains in her hand.

"You treat me like your daisy!" he complained.

"I hope not," she said, and dropped it hurriedly.

"You have not cut off my head yet, but you have done everything else, and now you propose to throw me away just as you have your poor little flower. Why mayn't I come any more?"

"You always wish me to come without telling Boo."

"You know there is no harm in that. We started in a game, we were acting a fairy tale. I, according to Janet, was your knight who came to the castle to see—to see—and then we both thought it was—was—was so much nicer that our friendship should be a secret. Our secret! You used to say yourself it was such fun escaping from Boo."

"I know-I know," said Princess hurriedly, and then hesitated. Her fairy folk lore had told her that the humble maid, or royal princess, should meet a friendly knight on the castle wall, or in the woods, with no discredit to her maidenliness. She had thrilled with pleasure at the importance of such a secret acquaintanceship. It had been a childish custom with herself and Janet always to have a secret from Boo. Boo was generally informed that such was in the air, and had always paid great respect to these affairs, showing occasionally a timely curiosity to keep alive the flame of interest. Princess's relations with Thurston had started in this way. Boo had been informed that there was a secret on hand: but now a new sense had awakened in the girl that made her shrink from publishing the thing that had grown sacred to her. She shunned revelation with that fear of the girl who loves first unknowingly. feeling the pain she cannot account for throb in her veins, whilst harbouring the dim consciousness of a

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great joy she dare not acknowledge. Even Janet was excluded from the wondrous new thing. And now an unaccountable desire to throw it from her possessed Princess with all the strength of resistance that precedes the birth of passion.

"You must promise me not to come any more," she said.

"You had better tell them, then." And he added, "It would never be the same, would it?"

"I do not wish to tell them, only-"

They both stood up.

"You are tired of our fairy story?"

She turned her head away. No, she was not tired of the fairy story, only frightened by the joy it brought her. She could not tell him that. Then to her dismay he said, "Perhaps you are right, so good-bye little Princess!" Their hands touched, and he turned and went away from her, down the little slope across the streamlet, and at every step that he took the girl's heart sank lower.

For two days she bore his absence bravely enough. She sang about the garden as if nothing had occurred to banish all the joy of life from her little heart, or to make it beat inordinately at the sound of footsteps beyond the briar hedge; but on the third morning something broke the note of her song as it rose in her throat. She found herself confronted with an overwhelming sense of loneliness that frightened her. . . . What had she done? Why had she sent him away?

IV

[&]quot;He will never come again!" she said to Janet.

[&]quot;Perhaps he will," Janet suggested with no con-

viction in her tone. She wore a serious little look, that sat ill on the habitually radiant countenance, and watched her young mistress with almost comical gravity. They were together in the hollow; Janet standing on the edge with a basket of apples on her arm and a foot turned to depart. "Jim once went away in a dreadful fit—he came back."

"He had to come to cut the grass," answered Princess sadly.

"That's true," remarked Janet, with philosophic indifference to the despoiling of Jim's ardour regarding herself. A prolonged silence ensued. The girl racked her brain for a convincing idea on the subiect, whilst Princess hugged her knees and looked about aimlessly. She had expected something better by way of consolation from Janet. Janet had never before proved wanting on special occasions. She was usually dexterous in the finding of a loop-hole. If lanet thought he wouldn't come, she was afraid he wouldn't, and her heart sank a little further. Boo came upon them during the consolation, and the girls looked up guiltily as the old lady peered down from behind; then Princess gave a little laugh and lay down on her back, cushioning her head on the slope.

"You seem to live in this hole," said Boo.

"It's the orchard's drawing-room," returned the recumbent girl. "The chamber of our secrets too. Why, Boo! you look just like an old witch—I can't see your eyes—only great round spectacles that are bright green from the grass, and your face is quite black!"

"How about the last secret?" Miss Westoby de-

manded, ignoring the unflattering description of her appearance.

"Oh we are not going to tell you."

"Perhaps I know."

Princess felt herself blushing. She held hard to the ground. "We are not going to tell you, because it's all over." "All over," the girl repeated to herself and she looked wistfully down the opening of the hollow to the rivulet, thence across the moor to the wood on the horizon through which he had come on his big white horse. When she looked up again, Boo and Janet had gone, and a sense of miserable loneliness crept over her. She sat up and watched some swallows sweep across the skies, then crouched down again with her face pressing the soft turf. Why had she told him not to come any more? She could hear the world's heart beating. She dug the tips of her fingers into the yielding moss. Her world was empty now. He would never, never come again, and she had sent him away without any reason. The tears crept into her eves and sped down her cheeks and wetted the grass near her face. Surely she wasn't going to cry? But the thought made the sob come deep. She tucked her face nearer the ground. If it wasn't so miserable she'd laugh. What was the use of laughing?—he wouldn't come any more. So she lay, face downwards, a little blue bundle in the green hollow, her golden hair mingling with the daisies like molten sunshine.

When she moved at last to rise, she felt herself being gently lifted up. "Oh!" she murmured between a laugh and a sob, "you have dared to come." Oswald Thurston tightened his grasp.

- "Princess, my little girl, what were you crying for?"
- "For the moon," she answered.
- "Then I shall have to climb the skies to fetch it for you!"
- "You needn't," she whispered shyly. Their lips were very near. Thurston bent his head—and in that moment all the universe was theirs.

But meanwhile the "wizard practitioner" had stolen upon them and stood gloating malignantly over the unsuspecting lovers.

"Lord Thurston, if I am not mistaken," he said at last. The voice startled the pair apart, and the doctor stood between them swollen in countenance, his grey eyes staring from their grotesque surroundings in goggling triumph.

Thurston met the gaze in anger! then, conscious of the necessity of an explanation, he turned his eyes to the moorlands with a look of wandering hesitancy, as one arrested from action by an unexpected flood of challenging thought. He still clung to the hand of the girl. The sudden memory of that first ride, and all that had since happened pressed upon his consciousness. The canter in fever haste through the thickets with the nauseated sense of all things upon him—the spontaneous reining in when he emerged from the wood on to the broad sunlit moor, whose fresher air sailed with the breeze over the open country to meet him full in the face and bear away the weary man of him—the rabbit that rose at his feet and scampered away—the odd tower house, in the distance, catching at an idle curiosity that led him to investigate—the view of the young girl through a briar hedge, entombed as it seemed in newly cut

grass and wild flowers—those constant rides out to find her again—the half-playful, half-serious, intercourse that ensued—then the fictitious good-bye and this meeting again—this meeting at last.

"It is my father," said Princess.

He turned—what had he to say to this monster, this gloating, inflated animal who leered at him? That he begged his daughter for a wife! Dare he say that? He glanced back at the girl, and then at the practitioner. "You will excuse me today," he said at last. "I will come to-morrow." A look of amazement spread over the doctor's face. He hurried to speak, but caught at a word and stumbled in his effort. Lord Thurston turned his back, and in a moment had walked away.

V

Next day, to the surprise of the practitioner, Lord Thurston called, and the two men were closeted some time together. At the end of the interview Dr. Wells sought Miss Westoby in the little parlour downstairs, where he guessed she had been waiting anxiously enough to hear the outcome of the matter. She sat on the edge of her chair, and peered at him from behind her round glasses with a steady stare of attention. The little woman had forgotten her dislike to the ugly countenance in her anxiety to catch every word the doctor might utter, and thoroughly digest his meaning. His expression said much. It conveyed the idea that his prey had been caught in a trap of his own setting, but something of apprehension too. Escape was still possible.

"They are engaged?" she said.

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- "They are engaged."
- "What do you fear, then?"
- "The scoundrel is likely not to keep his word."
- " Why?"
- "Obvious reasons, Miss Westoby. Her grand-father kept a butcher's shop for one."

Boo visibly started.

- "Oh! you admit now there is something to be said on his side!"
 - "He has no side," she said with decision.

A momentary wave of tenderness for the loyal little lady silenced the practitioner.

"I have heard that the Thurstons are eccentric, but I think they have the reputation for being men of their word—men of honour," she continued.

The doctor scowled at the word,

"I do not look for that virtue among his class. A man's word, madam, only touches his honour when given to a man. Honour, indeed! If you hear of honour, it strikes me it will be the other way about,—the honour of his family—his name!—a mésalliance. Oh! I've heard it before, but I am the wrong man to deal with; he's booked, madam, booked."

"But there is no fear of anything of the kind," said the little woman calmly. She turned her head away. "I knew a Thurston when I was very young," she continued after a moment, then stopped.

- "Well?" he interrupted irritably.
- "He was a gentleman," she said.
- "Oh! they are that enough," he growled, and left her alone. She looked out of the window for a long time, her hands clasped idly in her lap, and a smile

on the old face. "But he was very poor," she murmured to herself.

An hour later Princess found her sitting just as the doctor had left her, only it had grown dark, and the girl could hardly see her face.

"Is that you, Princess?" said the old lady, and there was a tremor in her voice.

"Yes. What are you doing in the dark?"

"I was thinking you hadn't told me, child."

"I couldn't—I promised him I would not. I wanted to, Boo," she added,—"and—and we almost quarrelled."

"You know him well enough to quarrel, then?"

"Why, yes, I know him quite well; quite, quite well."

There was a little silence.

"Princess," said the old lady suddenly, "don't quarrel, ah! don't quarrel. A quarrel may drift and drift, and the more you love each other the worse it becomes."

It had grown quite dark; the words seemed to float on the air to Princess with the sound of rustling silk. Boo had gone out of the room.

Next morning Princess awoke with the wide wakefulness of one too consciously happy to spare a moment to drowsy dalliance. She sat up straight in her little white bed, and laughed at Janet whom she caught on tip-toe at the door, a look of deep mystery restraining her queer little countenance.

"What is it, Janet?"

"It's a letter," whispered the girl. "A love letter!" She reluctantly delivered up the missive and watched the breaking of the seal, then she retreated

with a sigh. Outside, she rehearsed in her mind the possible beginnings to the envied letter, and at each exciting epithet of hawfullest devotion her broom banged a corner of the stair. Jim had never thought of writing a letter to her. Miss Princess, of course, would not show her the letter, but she might by degrees say what was in it. Her heart thumped at the thought. She poked her head in at the door again, and grinned out the pent-up question.

"It's from Lord Thurston," said Princess with an assumed indifference. Janet crimsoned to the roots of her hair, and dropped the handle of the door. The broom slipped out of her hand.

"Oh!" she gasped after a moment's silence.
"Then he's a prince after all?"

"I don't think it's exactly a prince."

"But he's a lord?"

"He is a lord."

"That's a prince!" she said defiantly, and Princess felt in her heart that he was certainly a Prince, though in her mind she had doubts of the title.

Meanwhile the house party at Hansdale had broken up. Mrs. Clive was the last to depart, and Thurston decided to leave the same afternoon.

"Are you going to town or on?" said Mrs. Clive, as they mustered in the hall for farewells.

"On," said Thurston ambiguously.

"To the maid of the inn?" she laughed.

"Ah! Janet!" His face flushed with pleasure.

"She's not at the inn, though!"

"There is an inn, then?"

He hesitated. "You are charming, but you have a fault!"

- "Many," she answered; "which have you discovered?"
 - "A flattering one to me."
 - "You hardly deserve that!"
- "I thought I didn't—'tis your caprice to give to the undeserving."
 - "They had better have my faults than-"
 - "You lack a virtue I would have you give me."
 - "What is that?"
 - "Which am I to tell you first?"
 - " The fault."
 - "The lacking of the other is equally a fault."
 - "No; only a shortcoming. Tell me."
 - "You shall divine which is which."
 - "Well!"
 - "The carriage waits you."
 - "I don't care."
 - "You will be angry?"
 - " No."
 - "Curiosity," he said.

She shot an inscrutable glance.

- "'Tis a virtue," she answered.
- " Define it."
- " Profound interest."
- "That was the lacking quality I desired of you."
- "Ah! you are delightfully impertinent! Goodbye."

The carriage drove off, and Thurston turned on his heel with a smile. His host, cigar in mouth, was standing gloomily in the hall.

"Charmin' woman, ain't she?"

The ain't she rang pathetically. There was an evident turbulence beneath the chequered waistcoat.

- "Charming," said Thurston.
- "Confounded ass, her husband!"
- "Oh! confounded ass."
- "Why must you go this afternoon?"
- "I have sent on my luggage to the station. I thought of walking down."
 - "We'll send for it."
 - "Thanks, I think I must get on."
- "Beastly dead-alive hole this when nobody's in it.
 . . . I shall go up to town to-night, if you must be off."

Thurston left in the afternoon. At the station he was met by a dog-cart on which his luggage was piled. He did not enter the station, but mounted the vehicle, and drove some two or three miles to the Swan Inn. His name was entered as Mr. Thurston, and the best front parlour allotted for his convenience. An hour later he walked over to the apple orchard across the fields and through the thickets, emerging at last on to the open moor. Now and then he laughed to himself at the thought of Mrs. Clive's charming persistency in the barmaid theory, and the world's likely grimacing when it should hear of his determination, and a little, too, from the joy that ran riot in his blood. Would he not be lodged that night two miles nearer to Princess!

VI

For a month things went happily in the crooked house on the edge of the moor, and life there seemed as that in Fairy-land, enchanted from all evil; but an ill-conditioned sprite crept in at last, unobserved, and played havoc with the hearts, the tempers, and the

judgments of all who dwelt therein, as sprites will do occasionally, making the wisest act foolishly, the noblest meanly, and the kindest cruelly.

It was all just like a book, thought Janet—just as real as a book! There was Miss Princess eating nothing, and wandering about with great wide-open staring eyes, and never crying at all; and Miss Westoby reading the newspaper topsy-turvy, so agitated she was! And the master a-walking up and down, growling and snarling, and a-sayin' "I told you so" whenever Miss Princess wasn't near to hear. The lovers had quarrelled-no one knew for what reason-and Lord Thurston had gone away, and never wrote or done nothin', and it was the tremendussest thing she had ever heard of. That matters would right themselves at last, down at the bottom of her little heart Janet was quite certain; but she had no wish to assure herself of that probability at present—there was something in the situation that appealed to her sense of hawfulness; the temptation to meditate on the most pessimistic point of view was one she found impossible to resist.

The good Jim discovered her talking to herself over the pots and pans. "Oh!" she said, a little startled, "it's you, Jim. Have you heard?"

Jim had not heard.

"They've quarrelled!"

"Ouarrelled?"

"Of course; lovers halways quarrel," she said; "but I'm afraid he's gone for hever."

Jim did not quite hold with his little mistress that it was a necessity lovers should understand each other in that way. They did not quarrel, he asserted

humbly. Janet stared. "We won't never quarrel!" he stammered.

She shot a look of withering scorn. "Ours is not a real love haffair. We don't meet unbeknowed to our families. You can't turn out to be a prince, or write letters the same night as what you've seen me, or quarrel and ride haway and never come back any more!" she ended indignantly.

In truth Princess had quarrelled with her lover, and quarrelled, just as those who really love one another do, about absolutely nothing. She denied they had quarrelled to her father out of a kind of childish shame, shrinking from going into the question with him. She had seen Oswald stride away in extraordinary anger-she had not been very angry herself, and his sudden heat had surprised her into an unnatural coldness. "You had better not come back. then," she had said impulsively, and he went at once. She had wandered from the orchard into the house, the cool shadowiness within seeming to offer a moral shelter from the storm that had passed out in the sunshine, and she stole up the staircase to the unused front parlour, and sat down before the window. She followed mechanically the doings of the few stray passers-by with a persistent interest in their most trivial movements that is only possible to those who are forcing into the background of their mind an allabsorbing thought. He had gone-he would not come back! That was the pain. The quarrel had been nothing indeed!

Presently an old man hobbled out of his seat in a great carriage, and up the steps to the front door. The ringing of the bell resounded through the house,

and dinned unwontedly in her ears. The county magnate was ushered through the narrow hall, and closeted with her father. Then a stable-boy, a dull-looking lad, stopped before the house, and after a moment's hesitancy hurried up the step and knocked. She heard Janet at the door.

" He's hengaged."

"Urgent," said the boy.

There was a pause. Her father came out.

"Gentleman at the Swan Inn, sir; stranger, sir."

"I can't possibly come," said the practitioner irritably; "go to Marshall."

The door banged. The disappointed boy stood a moment, then set off at a run. The view gradually darkened, and lights here and there began to spot the misty horizon. The tips of her fingers grew quite cold, but she did not stir.

VII

Oswald Thurston did not return, and Princess read in the angry expression of her father's eyes, in the sympathy from Boo's, and in the bright wistful look in Janet's, which more than the others seemed to haunt her with a repeated assurance of the seriousness of the affair, that her lover would not come back. No one gave her one little thread of hope, yet she hoped till the weeks went by and no word came. "Well," she said one day to Janet, "we acted our part, didn't we? It was our faults if we forgot that we were acting," and smiled the saddest little smile in the world. Janet began to cry. The excitement

of the situation had long passed; her heart was aching now for her beloved mistress. Princess looked at her steadily, then the tears crept up for the first time into her own eyes. "Dear old Janet," she said, "don't cry like that."

At last the practitioner went to Boo with a determined plan. The little lady listened to the unfolding of it with growing horror.

"You will not do it," said Boo. "You will not, you dare not. Surely you dare not?"

"Dare not! It's done," said the practitioner.

"You will withdraw?"

" Not I."

"It is infamous."

He laughed. "It is infamous because it touches the pocket of an aristocrat."

"It is a question of honour."

"We have different notions on the subject of honour, madam."

"Think for one moment of Princess!"

"It is of her I am thinking."

"You will bring her into court!"

"Why not? She is young, she will forget that and will be twenty thousand pounds the richer."

"And generally despised by her fellow-creatures."

"By a handful of snobs. What have they done for her? What did they do for her mother? Killed her, madam, killed her with a sniff of their nostrils, because she married your humble servant instead of one of their profligate kind. I tell you I delight, I revel in the idea. He fooled us for his amusement; he shall pay. Such vermin don't like paying."

"You sell your daughter!"

"On the contrary, I charge for the slight, and keep my daughter."

"You would have him pay for the wrong he had done her?"

"It is an old custom, Miss Westoby, even in his own class. The price was blood. We have learnt that the blood of such dissolute apes is worthless. We claim the thing of the highest value. It was once life; to-day it is money. Market rules morals, not morals the market."

Boo looked up at the cold-hearted satirist and trembled. Then the tears welled up to her eyes. What could she do? how could she help Princess against this formidable parent?

The practitioner watched her for a moment or two, and then exclaimed: "What do you owe to them? You think I do not know who you are; you think I do not know that they left you to starve; that you had to take such a place as this to live; that your people, not one of whom lack this world's good things, have never held a hand to help you; that the Countess of L—— hardly knows that you exist, though she's your first cousin. What do you owe to them? What have they done for you? Their honour never suggested to them that it was hardly befitting that a lady of their family should seek refuge as a governess in the house of such as I. Why do you not hate them?"

The little woman looked amazed at the question. Never in her life had she heard such a long speech concerning her own affairs. Nothing of it reached her sensibility but the extreme personality of such remarks. She had not dreamt of questioning the

right of her own people to ignore her after the loss of her small income. Matters had not appeared to her in that light. She had ignored them; and the practitioner's view seemed as vulgar as it was indelicate. Yet she grasped there was a note of sympathy intended. A fear of hurting his feelings forbade her to reveal a lack of appreciation. It was his way of holding out a hand; his rough way of standing to her side. To show him his error would be likely to humiliate the man: his hatefulness increased the obligation. Moreover, the hideous gravity of the situation concerning Princess called on all the tact and forbearance she could command. He must be beaten, and yet how was she to reach him? The sense of her own impotence sent a wave of sickness through her. She realized the indomitable determination of her opponent to pursue the course he had decided upon, and how vain any effort of hers would be to deter him; yet the thought that this nightmare of a thing was to come to pass seemed to take the life's blood from her. She continued to plead gently, persistently, courageously, till her ideas became confused through the inability to conjure up any new argument, and the necessity of detaining him till that came to her aid by a flow of entreaties. The affair was to be finally settled that morning when the lawyer was expected. She dreaded the sound of the bell, though she had nothing else to say, and the practitioner remained obdurate. He had met her arguments with sarcasms and sneers, coarse iests and tyrannous "madams." She sank down in her chair as he turned his back, and strode out of the room and up the stairs. She listened to each footfall.

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Then the front door bell rang, and she covered her face with her hands.

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"Is it possible that she should not appear?" asked Dr. Wells.

- "Quite impossible," said the little lawyer.
- "Illness?"
- "The case would be postponed."
- "For the first day, at any rate. I am anxious that she should not appear. She might bungle matters. It is absolutely necessary that she should not understand the drift of things."
 - " My dear sir!"
- "That is my point! She must be ignorant that it is a Breach of Promise."
 - "She's bound to know at the first question."
- "I think not—she has never heard of such a thing as breach of promise. I have explained to her that it is necessary it should be proved that she was engaged to and seeing Lord Thurston these past months every day. I have told her that he had been in some trouble that she would not understand, and that it is necessary to prove he was up here, and moreover engaged to her. She thinks she is doing him a service."

"It's the most astonishing thing I have ever heard of. It doesn't seem to me quite regular."

"Regular! I think we understand one another that you were to accept my plans at a certain figure, provided I asked you to do nothing actually incriminating,—incriminating, I think, was the word."

"Precisely," said the little lawyer nervously. "Go on."

"Very well; this is my plan. I should like things to have got on as far as possible before she is cross-examined. Supposing a telegram were sent to court to the effect that she could not appear that day, would things go on?"

"I think not, and I don't quite see how you would

help matters by postponing her appearance."

"I will explain. Illness surrounds youth with a halo of interest. The papers will be full of the case and her non-appearance. Public sympathies will be raised by imaginative journalists who will find good copy in the matter. Public opinion speedily enters a court. On the second hearing I am ready to swear that on her appearance judge and jury will be biased in her favour; that's my notion, at any rate. Moreover, I do not wish her to be at the counsel's opening speech, nor at hand where papers are likely to be thrust under her nose. You must tell me what questions she is likely to be asked, and I will manage that she answers them satisfactorily."

"Did they quarrel?"

"No; I asked her that. She said no. She's very reticent about it—obviously the hound went, as he came, with very little ceremony."

"Of course the counsel need know nothing of our plan."

There was a silence between the two men for some moments, then the practitioner broke out,—

"By God, I mean to crush the worm, and if you don't like the affair you can go to the devil—I'll find some one who will."

"If they had no quarrel, I think we are safe," said little man, rising.

PART II

VIII

As soon as Thurston, on leaving Princess, had thrown a leg across his saddle, and whipped on his mare to a pace likely enough to break both their necks, he realized how rough and cross, and even rude he had been to the little girl. Mrs. Clive was right: he was a fiery, ill-tempered, cursed boor-a brute, too! correct the shortcoming he spurred his unfortunate animal fiercely, and muttered something very much like an oath when a little lad unexpectedly sprung from under some gorse immediately across his path. The mare reared, shot ahead, then plunged and threw her rider heavily to the ground as a hoof caught in a hole not a foot in diameter. A little furred creature, a stone's throw off, sat up on its tail and looked at the amazing tumble that scattered the entrance of his home to the four winds. The lad. who, with a boy's love of a gentleman equestrianswears and all-had watched from a distance, hurried along to the spot. He stared down for several moments at the upturned face, then murmured, "My golly! he's dead."

A heavy cart was rumbling a little way off. He hallooed. The horses stopped, and an old man got down and slowly came up to the group. Some hurried speech in monosyllabic vernacular passed between them, then they stooped down and lifted up the body, and carried it to the cart.

When Thurston came to consciousness he found himself at the inn with no recollection at all of what had happened. They told him he had fallen from his horse, that he had been three weeks ill, and that a dangerous operation had been performed. He inquired if Wells had been sent for, and heard that he had refused to come.

A pile of unanswered letters was by his side, enclosed in a big envelope addressed, "O. Thurston, Esq." His man had sent them on from town, having been instructed to omit the usual prefix.

He turned wearily to them. They had sent for Wells, then, and he had refused to come! Had that been Princess's message? Surely not! But it had been a serious enough participation by the practitioner in their quarrel! He toyed with a letter in his hand, then glanced at it. His mother wrote, anxious to know where he was. Wouldn't he come to Coombsleigh? The birds were woefully strutting about in shameful safety. He folded up the letter, and tried to think of Princess, but his thoughts ran riot, he could not control them; the effort became fatiguing, the past was blurred. The beautiful little girl he had fallen in love with, it seemed a long, long time ago now, had sent him away. That was it. "Perhaps it was best," he reiterated to himself, hardly knowing what he meant. The past seemed a dead thing that he was vainly trying to shake into life.

On the morrow he left the inn for Coombsleigh.

Settled there he gradually regained strength, and with renewed vitality returned the thought of the little girl he had loved all in a day, quarrelled with, and ridden away from. He had no recollection now of

why they had quarrelled; it was surely a trivial matter, and he knew that, had he not fallen from his horse, and lain insensible for weeks, the morrow would have found him by her side again. But Fate had intervened; was it not for the best?

They were sitting under the awning on the terrace. He looked up at his mother, and tried to imagine her reception of Princess. The picture did not seem incongruous; but the practitioner, the uncouth, ill-mannered son of a tradesman! Dare he introduce him into the group? He laughed a little bitterly to himself. Fate had had her way—the wisest way perhaps.

One morning, a week later, he threw open the great window of his room, and stood for some time looking at the distant hills, a dividing line between him and the land stretching north to the breezy moor that had been all his world so short a time ago. The early morning air seemed to reinstate the natural man of him. The protracted illness and convalescence had dulled his sense of facts; things had seemed vague and shadowy, and he in the hands of an omnipotent fate. Until then it had not been his habit to bend to the dictation of circumstances. He grasped with sudden shame the fact that he was playing the poor creature's part. He had quarrelled with Princess, that was the reason he had left her, there was no other motive. He would go and ask her to forgive him.

He went downstairs with a renovated sense of life stirring in his blood. He would go North to-day. He stood at the hall door and greeted the old postman with a laugh as the bag was handed in. He

took the letters himself into the dining-room. Lady Coombsleigh was not yet down. He put her letters in her place, and glanced through his own. Among others was a missive from Rawson, his lawyer. What had Rawson to say? He broke the seal. There was an enclosure and a note. He read the one, then slowly perused the other. Every drop of blood left his face, and his hands trembled as he restored the papers to the parchment envelope. Lady Coombsleigh came in and was shocked at his appearance.

"You were so much better yesterday," she said.

He looked at her a little vaguely.

"Why, yes; I am much better. I must run up to town to-day."

"Oh! don't; you are not nearly strong enough!" she persisted.

He smiled tenderly at her.

"You'll see when I have had my breakfast."

He sat down, and his thoughts travelled on like the whirlwind, and in their midst was he, engulfed, shattered, tossed hither and thither, and made wild sport of. Was he going to be ill all over again? Then rage—uncontrollable rage—danced in his veins; he had to steady his hand with knife and fork. So these were the people he had dreamt of presenting to his mother! This was the refined element he was to introduce among his set as morally superior to theirs. This was the girl who, though born of common parents, was a pure little lady, worthy of any surroundings. A girl who sued him for £20,000 for breach of promise! Good God! what had he not escaped!

IX

Every poster bore it in large letters: "Breach of Promise Case against Lord Thurston." Every paper boy cried it out at the top of his shrill voice; every idle cad or bustling clerk, every dandy, lawyer, politician and petty tradesman discussed the matter for the next two days with the first listener, who was ignorant of the latest details circulating by hearsay since the rising of Court, at the end of the brilliant and detailed opening speech of Counsel, in consequence of a telegram which was handed to the Judge stating that the plaintiff was unable to appear through illness. The drivers of cabs threw witticisms across the congested thoroughfares to one another, and the loitering women pursed up their painted lips and uttered oaths of satisfaction, with a hungry look of envy peeping from their eyes. Sunday in the Row, at luncheon parties and in the Clubs the one and only topic was the entanglement of poor Lord Thurston-and discussion of the dreadful person who had got hold of him.

"Who would ever have dreamt of Thurston being caught in that sort of way. They say she has taken to herself some absurd foreign title—Princess or something. Daughter of a Manchester butcher I hear. It's awful! Golden-haired too!"

"If that were her only peculiarity," said Lady Helen.

The first speaker looked hurriedly round the table and observed the different shades of glaring red and gold about him: Lady Helen's coiffure was a perfect specimen of the art.

- "Ah! you know in their class it has a special distinction."
- "Their morals are apt to be artificial too, you mean," put in a dowager.
- "My hair's dyed, but my morals are quite natural," said a pretty American, and the table laughed.
- "A man should never permit such a case to come before the public," observed a moralist at the Club. "He must be taught to pay for his amusements. A gentleman should not take the lesson from a court of law."
- "You are talking preposterous nonsense," retorted an inflated sportsman with an extremely unprepossessing countenance. "We'd have a whole army of clamorous impostors on our backs."
 - "Some of you might, I suppose."

A noisy appreciation followed this remark, which was not taken part in by the ugly sportsman.

- "Nine cases out of ten there's been no promise at all. Put-up job," he went on. "Damned if I wouldn't go bankrupt before I'd pay a farthing. They say she's the lowest type of ——"
 - "Bloomin' lord in for it this time, Bill!"
 - "Blasted good thing, too!"
 - "She ain't an angel, I 'ear!"
- "Pair all the better with some o' 'is relations, I am er thinkin' of!"
 - "Well, 'e ain't a bad sort 'isself, they say!"
 - "She'll keep the b——blance then!"

And Princess sat in the green apple orchard in the

little hollow with her hands clasped in her lap, and her eyes fixed on the wood, thinking of the day when the big white horse came through with her prince astride it. He was in trouble of some kind now, and he didn't know she was going to help him to-morrow. She laughed softly to herself. She would certainly see him on the morrow and he would be sorry he had left her! but she would be proud just at first—only just at first.

The court was crowded when the plaintiff entered the witness box.

Lord Thurston was not present.

A strange hush reigned as the almost child-girl, tall and slender as a reed, a mass of golden hair falling about her shoulders, faced the judge, shy and troubled with something of expectancy in the wholly innocent look that met the eager stare of a hundred eyes.

A voice from the crowd murmured "An' 'er 'air all hangin' down 'er back"; but the observation seemed to intensify the silence. The judge moved uncomfortably in his seat, and the lawyers fumbled with their papers. The first question was put after a full minute's interval; and then the sweet voice, with a demure simplicity that had so charmed Thurston on his first meeting little Princess, vibrated through the court, reaching the very hearts of all those present. The men writhed under a sense of chivalrous shame, and one and all mentally dubbed Lord Thurston a scoundrelly cur. As the examination proceeded, question after question was frankly answered, till at one pointedly, even grossly personal,

a crimson flush bathed the hitherto pale little face and tears leapt to her eyes. The judge interfered. Some words passed between Counsel, then the case continued:—

"I understand from your statements that you were seeing Lord Thurston every day. What happened at the last interview?" questioned the Counsel for the defence.

Princess hesitated for a moment. She glanced hurriedly at her father, then said,—

- "We quarrelled!"
- "You were reconciled before Lord Thurston left you?"
 - " No."
 - "He left you in anger?"
 - " Yes."
 - "He broke the engagement?"
 - ". No."
 - "He did not break the engagement?"
 - " No."
 - "The engagement was not broken?"
 - "Yes."
 - "Explain yourself more clearly!"
 - "I broke the engagement!"
- "Then you did not expect to see Lord Thurston again?"
 - " No."
 - "He said he would not return?"
 - " I begged him not to come any more."
 - "You did not wish at the time to see him again?"
 - " No."
 - "Did you make any effort at a reconciliation?"
 - " No."

- "In other words you yourself broke the engagement and dismissed Lord Thurston?"
 - " I did."
 - "You lay no claim to his fulfilling his promise?"
 - " None."

A low murmur swept through the court.

"My lord," said the Counsel, "I think I have sufficiently proved that there was no breach."

The Counsel for the plaintiff sprung to his feet.

- "Well?" questioned Mrs. Clive. Thurston stood in the doorway with a telegram in his hand.
 - "The case is dismissed."
 - " I congratulate you!"
- "I wish to God she had succeeded." He glanced through the little hotel window and watched mechanically Clive and his boy wrestling with an immense kite on the beach. "They are still at it!" he said with a wan smile.
- "My husband's just as much of a boy as Ronnie. Well, you will come with us South, won't you?"

He walked over to her side and sat down. "I have a dreadful desire to see her again. You know, I am beginning to feel that it's no use——"

- "No use what?"
- "Trying to forget her. Trying to think that we never. . . . Trying to think that anything matters. . . . What do I care what they'd all say——?"

Mrs. Clive rose from her seat and leant up against the mantelpiece. "My dear friend, nothing matters but one thing—everything is possible to bear but that——"

" Well ?"

"To be tied to one you might learn to hate—one you might grow to shrink from. You have a passion for this child. That will pass, and then? If she is what it seems to me she must be, a very common little soul in a pretty little body, you must grow to despise her."

"If you knew her!"

"I wish I did. You were so naughty about it. Of course, no doubt she has been forced to take this action by her father, who, as you say, is rather a low class of man. She may have been coerced; but it seems to me she might have sent you a line. No, no, don't commit such a folly; a girl who could appear in Court in a breach of promise——"

"Don't say it. Don't say it. It's awful-damn-My whole being revolts against the thought. I try not to realize it. I came to you here away from London to hide—to hide from my own thoughts—to hide from the truth. To escape the sound of her name bawled in the public streets—to hear nothing, nothing of the trial in which she was to be pilloried before the world. I deny it—I deny it every day. 'She is in her apple orchard,' I say over and over again. 'This is some cursed dream." He stopped short for a moment, then went on. "Whilst I waited for the telegram from England just now, I cheated myself into thinking perhaps it wouldn't come-perhaps there'd be no telegram to come—that it was all a delusion of my brain since the operation. But it came! My God, it came!"

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- "Janet," said Princess, "what's the matter? Why do you look at me like that?"
 - "I was wonderin' if you knew!"
 - "Knew what?" she answered listlessly.
- "Well, I s'pose you must, as you was there—leastways, that's what Jim says. He says ye'd been hawfully rich if you'd got it."
 - "If I got what?"
 - "Why, the money!"
 - "What money?"
- "The twenty thousand pounds damages—that's what he said. 'Breach of promises always has damages,' he says."
 - "What's a breach of promise?"
- "Why, what you've been up to London for—'cause Lord Thurston jilted you. And he would have to pay you all that money 'cause he wouldn't marry you as he promised, so your pa just had him up for breach of promise, that is, for having promised and not doing it—they have to pay for that if you gets the case—that's law, says Jim."
- "It is not true!" said Princess. "My father would not do such a thing. It was a lawsuit about some rights of property. They had to prove that he was engaged to me, for some reason I didn't quite understand——"
- "It was all in the papers," said Janet, and turned a little pale as she spoke. There seemed to her something dreadfully wrong, "P'raps I oughtn't to have told."
 - "You are quite mistaken," Princess answered

coldly. "Jim could not have understood." She turned on her heel and walked away. Right down in her heart a sense of sickening fear was stirring. She had denied the truth of Janet's statement before she had grasped its full meaning. Now as she pondered over the words again they entered her mind with new significance. She recalled the trial, and remembered the personal questions put to her by the men in gowns. A flush of shame swept over her face, then she turned white to the lips. Had her father indeed done this dreadful thing? Would not Boo have told her? Boo had looked oddly at her the day she had gone to London. Yes, she remembered now that Boo had avoided her of late, and her father, too, had seemed so dreadfully angry after the trial. "Why did ye lie to me?" he had reiterated over and over again with an almost pathetic insistency, and then he had drunk and drunk. girl shuddered at the recollection. She would go and ask Boo at once. Boo would surely tell her. She hastened to her room, and then, as she entered, she knew it was true. She caught the pity lurking in the old governess's eyes. Again the blood leapt to the unhappy girl's face.

"Well, my dear, you look tired. Come here!"
Princess did not move. She stood staring with fixed eyes. Boo shifted uncomfortably in her seat.

- "Why did you not tell me?"
- "My child!"
- "I had not hurt you. Why did you not save me from this?"
 - "I did my best—I had no right to interfere——"
 - "But to save me!"

- "I am only a paid servant, you know."
- "You are not paid. It wouldn't have been such a great loss to you if you had had to go away—this dreadful thing would not have happened then."
- "It would have happened just the same. He would have forced you, ill-treated you. God knows what he would not have done!"
- "You know I would not have consented; Boo, it was wicked not to tell me. I can never, never forgive you."
- "My child," said the old lady with a strange note of despair in her voice. "Don't speak like that. I cannot bear it; you were all I had!"
- "I would rather have died than brought you to such shame."
- "I would willingly have died, child; but I was frightened. I had given my word not to betray him!"
 - "You betrayed me instead!"
- "I have eaten his bread for sixteen years. I could not see that it was right."
 - "Right!"
 - "He is your father!"
 - "That's what so dreadful!"
 - " Princess!"
 - "I have no one now—no one!"

There was a silence in the little room for some minutes, then Boo broke down. She crouched into the arm-chair and cried pitifully. Princess watched the shrivelled old hands cover the face she had known from her childhood as so brave and beautiful in its gentle serenity, then she hastened to her side and put her arms round her. "Don't, Boo, dear;

don't, Boo! Forgive me. My heart is broken, and I don't know what I say. Boo, dear, help me to bear it all. I cannot unless you will help me. There, we are both going to be good. I am crying a little bit because you are crying. Boo, dear, stop. stop!"

"It's a letter for you, Miss," said Janet nervously. They were alone together.

Princess took it with trembling hands and broke the seal. Inside was a cheque made payable to Miss Princess Wells for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, accompanied by a note written in pencil, dated from Chambers:

"I enclose the amount the law refused to grant. I hope it will make you happy."

"Janet! Look!"

XI

Thurston returned from abroad suddenly with the intention of settling up some of his affairs before rejoining the Clives in the South. He looked wearily at the pile of letters that awaited him, and made no move to open them. On leaving England he had left word that he wished to hear no details of the trial, merely the verdict was to be wired to him, so that now he found matters enough to peruse in the bulky packet from his lawyer lying with the rest. He sat down at the table and opened one by one the letters of less importance, taking at a glance their insignificant contents till the thicker packet alone remained. Then his man opened the door and an-

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nounced that a female person below wished to see him, by name of Green.

"I don't know the name. What does she want?" he said, breaking the seal of the letter in his hand.

"She won't leave her business, sir."

"Ask her up then," he murmured indifferently. The man disappeared, and before Thurston knew what had happened, Janet stood before him, a funny little hat decked with false flowers on her head, a bright green cape twisted awry on her shoulders, and an immense umbrella clutched tightly in her red little hand.

"Janet!" he said, leaping to his feet.

"Jim's outside," she replied, with an immense amount of dignity. "I didn't ask him to come up with me as I thought it might make you feel awkward. He's hasty—he's no notion of conducting haffairs."

For all the sudden painful recollections his unexpected visitor caused him, Thurston could not help smiling at the quaint little woman. "What is it, Janet?" he said with great gentleness.

"My mistress sends you this, and she begs to thank you for the little present, and hopes you are quite well, and you'd better keep the present for she doesn't want it!" Wherewith Janet handed the twenty thousand pound cheque and pursed up her little lips with a significant air of patronising contempt. Thurston took the envelope and placed it on the table.

"Your mistress is quite well?"

"Quite well."

"And Miss Westoby?"

"Well enough!" she snapped.

"I am glad!" He looked into the girl's eyes for several moments, then turned and walked up and down the room. After a little while he said,—

"That fairy story of yours didn't have quite the proper ending, did it?"

Janet looked aghast, then cried, "O mister, mister! why did you go away and behave so dreadfully? and my poor young missus who was dragged into Court, and she didn't know what they was after—thinkin' all the time she was doing you a service; and the papers, they said she looked so young and innocent and lovely, and heverybody's hearts was beatin' for her, and then she went and told them she'd sent you away! Jim says there was what they calls 'er hawful sensation' in court, and she came back and never knew what had happened. O mister! ye must have seen it in the papers. I thought you would 'ave come and said you was sorry. O mister! you are sorry, I can see—you have the hawfull hagardest face as if you'd been ill all your life."

Thurston turned to the table and hastily glanced through the papers relative to the terrible case. In the formal words of a lawyer's writing he read the story Janet had just detailed to him. "It is believed that Miss Wells was ignorant of the purport of the case——" He threw down the paper. His head swam, he reeled for a moment, then caught at Janet's arm. "Come, come, let's go—Let us go now—What?—Too ill!—nonsense; I am well at last—I want more air, that's all, air of the moor—She'll understand—Rest!—how can I rest?—Janet, where are you?—Do you think she'll forgive me? Come, let's

go now—now. The words died on his lips as he staggered and fell heavily to the ground.

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Boo, after the interview with Princess, remained confined to her room and would admit no one. paced the narrow strip of carpet till her aged feet ached, and she was forced from sheer exhaustion to sink on to the first chair at hand, from which she stared at the wall paper in apathetic fixity, then rose suddenly and wandered up and down again. The world to the little old lady had grown very over-shadowed. Had not Princess found her wanting?—Princess had found her wanting, that was the recurrent thought that kept her unceasing company—not even time could eradicate the difference between them, not even time: and there was so little time left to her. She was old, so old—that was why perhaps she had failed -vet could she have done otherwise? The thought that she might was the severest pain she had to bear. To have betrayed Dr. Wells, even if she could have brought her conscience to do so, would have meant her own instant dismissal; she shrank from the thought. Her charge had been all she had in the world—all she loved most dearly and passionately. Yet she felt now that she must go; for though Princess had expressed her grief at her own hasty words, the fact remained that in her heart the child would never forgive her. She must go away, she could not face reproach again. They could never be the same to one another. But where where should she go? How could she live, and what would life be to her without Princess?

She continued to pace the room, with the intervals only of the night, till the afternoon of the second day, when Princess herself brought her some tea and toast to the door. She took it in, and drank the tea and eat the toast and tidied her cap. She would tell the practitioner she must go. He had returned from London almost insensible from intoxication, but he would be sobered by now. Anyhow, she'd go up and see. The fear that ordinarily possessed her when seeking an interview with the dreaded man after bouts of such excess was entirely absent. No feeling of the habitual terror assailed the sensitive little woman on nearing the precincts of the detestable chamber. Her heart seemed a dead thing, her body a vessel that must needs carry a little longer the burden of life. She was going away for ever! Nothing else mattered.

She knocked several times at the door, and receiving no answer, opened it sufficiently wide to look in.

All that met her eyes was a tiny rabbit attached by its foot to a table, yet nevertheless sitting up on its haunches peering about with erect ears and sniffing of nostrils. A soft-eyed wondrous little brown thing in the incongruous, hideous apartment.

"Poor creature! Poor little one!" murmured Boo, and she hurried to the table, but stumbled over something on the floor. She bent her short-sighted eyes to the ground, then stooped quickly. Lying face downwards between her and it was the body of the practitioner. She shrank back as the hand she touched slipped from hers, cold and lifeless, grasping the dissecting knife in its dead fingers. She hurried

out of the room, and down the stairs; then at the staircase window she stood still, for crossing the orchard beneath were the figures of Oswald Thurston and Princess. Princess—Princess and Oswald Thurston.

The Legend of St. Aphilon's Dome

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The Legend of St. Aphilon's Dome

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A POOR student sat at his table, and, whilst eating a frugal repast of bread without cheese, he penned the following epistle:—

"REV. FATHER,—A good woman who resides on the ground floor of this house has recently, through an accident, cut an artery in her arm, and is quite unable to work. Having heard of your kindness in the helping of the deserving poor, I beg to intercede for her, unable myself to offer more than half my menu, which is not of an elaborate kind.—I am, Rev. Father, yours obediently.

" MARCUS MANING."

Now, the Rev. Fathers of the Order of St. Aphilon were a congregation of saintly men who lived together under a rule wise and edifying in its purpose; but in the days when this young student composed his epistle they had forgotten a little of the simple teaching of their founder, and begun to emulate the fashionable fastidiousness of the world outside their gates, and pander to Mammon with a clerical dignity that covered the sin from too criticising eyes, so that St. Aphilon, their founder, would have been likely to

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grieve, had he been among them again, at the silver buckles they wore on their shoes, the dainty snuff-boxes they carried in carefully-gloved hands, and the four-posted bedsteads which had been introduced into the house on the pretext that he, St. Aphilon, had seen a vision whilst reposing on one.

Several days elapsed before the parish priest's representative called on the maimed woman, Mistress Meg, in answer to the student's letter, and conducted his beautiful person, his snuff-box and silver-buckled shoes, down stairs to the cellarlike room in which she lived. He remained on the threshold—the place seemed dark and dirty to him-and waving a plump, white hand, remarked, "Ah, my good woman, I heard you were ill." The tone was a reprimand. "You are not, then, ill." Mistress Meg raised her bandaged arm and let it fall, as he continued, "You are attending the services, I hope, at the Dome-that is right. I shall be preaching to-morrow at eight o'clock. thought you were ill, you know. A cut artery? Ah! deplorable accident! It is well bound up, I see"; and thus, without ever waiting to hear a syllable from the unhappy woman, he turned on his heel and picked his way up the stairs to daylight again, where he breathed with complacent satisfaction at having fulfilled the duty of visiting and comforting the sick and lowly. As he was about to hurry down the narrow street he observed a priest of his Order, whom he did not know, enter the doorway he had just vacated, and, deciding he must be one of the Fathers from the country, he thought no more of the matter.

A week later a great storm swept over the city, and the dome of St. Aphilon's Church, an immense

ST. APHILON'S DOME

new erection, hardly completed, was hurled from its walls to the ground, and the rain pattered in on to the marble pavement, swamping the officiating priests as they foolishly hurried from the sanctuary, not observing that it alone was protected from the storm—the roof untouched. As the hurricane cleared, the moon sailed from out the angry clouds, and one by one the stars spotted the firmament. For the nonce their great church had the eternal heavens as a covering, and some declared that prayer on that night came easier to those praying, and seemed to rise as incense from the sacrifice that found favour in His sight.

But the Fathers were in a desperate state, for how, indeed, were they to raise the money to rebuild the great dome? "The poor!" suggested a sagacious prelate. "We must make a pence collection among the poor." Whereupon a good soul among them, one Tomaso, protested with a sniff of indignation, as he partook of his snuff from a pewter box. "Preposterous!" said he; "the thing is an impossibility! We must have a flat roof. The poor, indeed! And they have not enough wherewith to purchase food. A prodigious miracle, truly, to get money where no money is!"

"You seem to have little faith in the miraculous," suavely remarked another. "Modern critics would do well, before asserting the incompatibility of miracle with natural law, to beg charity of the poor—from those who have nothing vast sums may be collected."

"It's a devilish miracle, then," exclaimed Father Tomaso, and therewith betook himself from the assembly. However, the notion was seized upon as a

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stupendous plan, and at once adopted. Within a very short space of time thousands of pounds were undeniably obtained.

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"I haven't any money at all," a poor woman remarked, her arms deep in soap-suds, and her crimson face peering obstinately at the priest from out the rising steam that clouded the squalid, dank room. The tip of our friend's nose only passed the threshold.

"My good woman, those who give to the glorious St. Aphilon shall have their money returned seven-fold. To help build the mighty Dome will, indeed, lay the foundation-stone of your own prosperity. Understand, it is St. Aphilon's Dome!"

"Will it be his very own?" remarked a pale-faced little child who stood surrounded by a halo of shadowy vapours.

"Certainly, my little man, and given him by his loving poor."

The woman looked disconcerted; then, after a little hesitation, took three coppers, the entire contents of an earthenware pot that stood on the mantelshelf, and gave them to the priest. "A dinner more or less won't hurt much," she murmured.

"To do what he likes with?" persisted the child, and, on receiving an affirmative, he dropped from his tiny hand a golden farthing into that of the spruce beggar.

Thus the Dome began again to rise upon its base within the great scaffolding, whilst the collection for its reconstruction continued; but, unfortunately once or twice it happened that during the night a quantity of the valuable lead, and other properties that are

ST. APHILON'S DOME

used for such constructions, disappeared, and none knew the reason thereof. One morning, as his well-dressed reverence was hurrying on the usual quest for money, he espied the doorway he had entered not long since to visit a maimed old woman, and noticing that the threshold and descending stairs looked cleaner than of yore, he guessed at better circumstances below, and hastened in to claim the widow's mite. He found the little kitchen was newly furnished, and bright and fresh even to his fastidious senses, with flowers on the table and a copper kettle boiling on the fire.

"I am delighted at your good fortune, Mistress Meg," said he, sinking into a not uncomfortable armchair; and forthwith a friendly chat, carried on principally in a monologue, ensued. The good woman, however, had something on her mind, and after much hesitation she at last exclaimed.—

- "The Rev. Father is very kind to me. What can I say——"
 - "What Rev. Father?"
 - "Of the Dome."
 - "Who? His name?"
- "I do not know his name. He has done all this for me, yet it is strange I have never seen him at church, excepting——"
 - "Excepting?" queried her visitor impatiently.
- "On the outside, at night! . . . Taking the lead off the Dome," she added.
 - " My good woman, you are mad."
- "Nay, it is true, and it's sorely on my conscience that it's no one but Satan himself befriending me. He brought me a little whisky—just a little."

THE LEGEND OF

The priest listened no more. He leapt from his seat and hurried home to break the significant news. A robber in the clothes of a priest had undoubtedly pilfered the Dome, and to appease his conscience succoured the old woman. Whisky, indeed!

The fathers received the story with incredulous indignation. The cloth thus disgraced! They must watch. . . . One of their own lay-brothers might be guilty—the thing must not be made public! . . . By the saints, it was preposterous! The miscreant should be taken hot-handed. Who would volunteer? Father Tomaso offered to watch on the Dome, and matters for the moment calmed down. That evening, as he made his way thither he encountered Mistress Meg, and, to that good woman's amazement, he winked—the pious and ascetic aged prelate winked! During the same night other thefts were committed; yet the reverend father failed to take his man.

"More of us must go," declared the Superior.

"Three of us will go—we will take our bedsteads.

The one on watch shall wake the others."

So the four-posted bedsteads were duly hoisted, and the three divines tucked in their respective eiderdowns.

Towards midnight they awoke at the sound of hammering, and, possessed suddenly by fear, waited awhile before peeping over the bedclothes to the place from whence the sound came. When they did, however, a strange sight rose before their eyes, and each would have thought he was dreaming, but that the others were likewise enthralled, staring at the spectacle before them. There indeed laboured a priest of the Order, but a halo radiated about his head, and as he turned they recognised the counter-

ST. APHILON'S DOME

nance of the blessed St. Aphilon, their founder and patron saint. He was tearing down the sheets of newly-laid copper, and placing them on a barrow. Near him stood, in wondrous robes of azure, like the heavens of the early morning, Mary, Regina Pauperum. "And will it be St. Aphilon's own?" echoed the sound of a little voice into one of the humbled priest's ears. What was his own he might give to his poor: what he gave to his poor he gave to his Master.

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The Rev. Father Tomaso was sleeping peacefully on his plank bed, when he was rudely awakened by the three watchers, pale and disconcerted.

- "Pray get up!" said they; "we must sit in council, things have seriously gone awry."
- "Our beds have been blown away!" murmured one; "we had better proceed to business at once."
- "Four-posters are top-heavy," kindly remarked Father Tomaso.
- "Magnanimous," thought they, glancing at his plank; and a short time afterwards, remembering the virtue, elected him Superior, when the Order again practised the beneficent precepts of their founder and exorcised the worldly devil who had settled in their midst.

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A Sentimental Philosopher

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A Sentimental Philosopher

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A Sentimental Philosopher

"AFTER all, to possess—possession is the greatest thing in the world! The only difficulty is, we don't know the value of our possessions, or of what we ought to possess, so that we go along through life choosing the wrong things and getting rid of the right."

"Child, you are quite mistaken. It is the desire of possession that counts—possession itself nauseates."

"The weak-minded, perhaps. No, Aunt Doe; after mature deliberation, I have come to the conclusion that the best of all joys is the abstract sense of possession—I was always sorry for that man 'who had great possessions'; he simply could not give them up."

"Really, Madge!"

"Well, I am very sorry; but that's how I feel—and I believe I am right."

"Humbug!" said Aunt Doe. Aunt Doe wasn't at all what she appeared: she had the outward look of a very prim, sanctimonious old maid, verging on seventy, and given to lecturing the young concerning the evil practices of the day. Yet she was none of these things, and, on the contrary, the practices of

the day (the ladies' day, at any rate) struck her as particularly delightful. She had secret yearnings to mount a bicycle, and envied the most manly young women of her acquaintance, especially those who wore spats, smoked cigarettes, and looked pretty withal. "I was born a century too soon," she informed the curate of the parish in the presence of one of these new ladies. "We couldn't do that in my days! Smoking is an excellent thing for the young. terics was the only sedative we were allowed. As to a music-hall!---" but the curate had interrupted with a hasty retreat. Just now she and her niece were together in the studio, an apartment practically the living-room, for they were very poor gentlewomen, these two, and got along, as the old lady profanely remarked, "the Almighty only knew how."

"When I was a girl," she continued, "our French governess used to tell us that when we conjugated the verb 'to possess' we should always leave out the first person singular."

"What a horrid person!"

"She was horrid; but she was paid to teach us, you know, and it wasn't a bad lesson."

"It was an abominable, vile lesson. How dared she! The only thing we poor human——"

"Dear me! It's all about those roses, I suppose. When are you going to marry him?"

"Don't! I can't bear to hear you say that—he—he—Stewart hasn't asked me. But he sent me the roses—he sent me the roses. Smell them." The roses were vigorously thrust under Aunt Doe's nose.

"Young men don't visit good-looking young women every other day for the greater part of the

year, and send them flowers on the slightest provocation, unless they mean to propose."

"Ah; all the things that the world says men don't do, it seems to me they most particularly do. Only they all deny it of one another—but they do them all the same."

"What you say sounds improper!

"I don't mean anything improper—only that life isn't a bit like what any one in the world describes it as being. It is always more—a great deal more, or ever so much less."

"What the dickens are you moralising in this sentimental manner for? It seems to me all very simple. He'll propose!"

"No, no. I am one of those women who are made love to but are never loved. Why, here comes Edie for her lesson!"

"Then I shall go out."

" Why?"

"She rustles so abominably. She makes me uncomfortably aware that my dress is not on a silk foundation. I shall go and buy you a twopenny-halfpenny present for your birthday since you are so keen on possessing to-day." Therewith Aunt Doe hurried out, giving a cold little nod to the fair Edith, who swept in, accompanied by a lively frou-frou, which undoubtedly would be most disconcerting to one at all sensitive to a personal absence of silk underwear. She was a lovely person, and brought an atmosphere of sunshine into the shabby room through the very gaiety of her presence. She set to her work with a great deal of chatter, and rushed into detailed accounts of her own affairs without the slightest

embarrassment or consciousness of lacking a proper reserve.

"I call him my mysterious knight. I do not see him very often, we are abroad so much, you know, and when he does come, he's so solemn that I am quite afraid. It was arranged by our parents that we should marry ultimately—our places join, you know. They say he's rather hard up, and some of my kind friends declare that it is nothing but a mariage de convenance; but I don't care what they say. I am frightfully fond of him, anyhow. I do sometimes wish he had sought me out of his own will—but he must care, or he wouldn't have consented. Would he? Come and look at my work!" she ended irrelevantly. "What do you think?"

"Oh! I think he must love you very much!"

"I mean my drawing."

"Let me look. I think—well, I think it resembles your imagination—it's too mediæval."

"That's a snub both to my imagination and to my painting."

Madge looked at her pupil oddly for a moment or two, then she turned her eyes moodily away. "When one's imagination is out of perspective," she said, "fate comes along and knocks it into shape—to do that she must thrust out many of our most cherished ideas."

"That sounds horrid. It's not like you to be cynical—cynicism always seems to me to be nothing else but calling everything that is beautiful by ugly names, or else the denying of what is good and beautiful altogether."

Madge laughed. "Yes, a kind of expression of one's own inadequacy. Because we are imperfect ourselves we seek to deny perfection in all else. I was jealous of your knight, so I wished to deny the existence of knights."

"Pooh! what nonsense, Madge! but I must go, it's late." Then she said, with a little look of shy hesitancy, "Do you think one can be too happy?"

Madge glanced down at the roses on the table, and moved a little nearer to them. "Not you," she answered. "but some of us can be."

"Some of us?"

"Yes; when in the great desire for something we delude ourselves into thinking we possess it, or may possess it, then one can be too happy."

"How hard! After all, we can only suppose we possess—we can never quite know—can we?"

"Who is cynical now?"

"Indeed, no! I am afraid of cynicism lest it might be true. . . You do think he cares for me, then?"

"Of course!"

"I must bring him to see you. Good-bye; I hear the carriage. Don't work too hard."

Left alone, the little painter sat herself down at the table and buried her face for a moment in the bowl of roses, and for full twenty minutes remained idly looking at the flowers, and tossing her thoughts about in airy castles of youth's dreaming, where she and the roses and he, and all the world's happiness, should take possession for ever and ever. Then Aunt Doe came in, and she jumped up and rallied her on her extravagance, as the good lady solemnly pro-

duced various dainties from a capacious pocket which were to be consumed for lunch in honour of Madge's birthday. Then she went up to the window and threw it open.

"How the birds are singing!" she said, and she looked out across the roofs of a squalid neighbourhood's dwarf houses, and found the view of chimney pots and crooked windows quite beautiful bathed in a misty sunshine. "They are always singing, really—if we would only listen," she murmured, "the air in London, just as well as in the country, is laden with the noise of these tiny creatures, only that we are too pre-occupied to notice. And then the great whirr of traffic besets our ears and the whirr of troublesome concerns besets our brains."

" Madge, don't talk nonsense!"

"Oh! but, Aunt Doe, when we are over happy, and have forgotten what we must do, and feel as gay as children, then their voices come to us through the open windows and doors, and we just kick our heels!"

"Really, Madge! Come to lunch at once, and stop such fal-la-la. Here's your health, my dear child, and I hope Mr. Stewart Gray will make you a good husband."

"You are a wicked old fairy, Aunt Doe. Your mind is, like your pocket, full of naughty prohibited things. What we cannot afford to pay for we must not possess."

"At what sum may Stewart Gray price himself?"

"At the price of a beautiful lady, of noble rank, and of pure heart, true and generous as himself, rich as a princess, young as seventeen, sweet as the flowers

of April, daintily clad, and possessed of little white hands and pink-tipped fingers."

"I don't admire the style at all—a wax doll, my dear, like Edith Hope!"

"No, not like Edith Hope—I was not thinking of her. No, no, not Edie—some one——"

"There's the postman!" interrupted Aunt Doe. Then a very scrubby little maid brought in a note. "Sent by hand, mum," she said.

"Dear Madge" (it ran), "Mother tells me that my knight is dining with us this evening. Do come in and meet him. Stewart Gray. Isn't it a jolly name? I shall be quite jealous of you. — In haste, EDIE HOPE."

Madge read the note over several times, and then, with a very pale little face, flashed a hurried look at her aunt; but the good lady was deep in the picking of a bone. "The birds seem to have stopped singing," she said, with an attempt at conversation.

"No; they are still singing!" said Aunt Doe.

"We can only suppose we possess!"

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. . . . The roses are mine, at any rate!" she added suddenly.

"Madge, you are out of your senses to-day."

"Not a bit. I have just recovered them. They had gone astray—a-trespassing. It was nice trespassing. I dreamed the garden where the flowers grew was mine. I dreamed I possessed——. We can only suppose we possess; we never quite know. Can we? Aunt Doe, you are eating all the chocolate."

" My dear!"

In an Idle Hour

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In an Idle Hour

I was away from the grey city, and the grey persons who live therein, and the coloured butterflies that infest it—away in the country, having stowed in a secret pocket of a town coat all the objectionable virtues necessary to a town liver, such as Prudence, Propriety, Policy, kid gloves, and visiting-cards. I became a veritable child—that sounds absurd for me, nevertheless I did; it's a process of retrogression not nearly so difficult as one might suppose, when Nature, and not Art, hath the meddling. Inconsequence stole up from the sea, and laughed in my face. Vigour caught me in her strong grasp, and rushed me down precipitous paths, over rounded boulders, sharppointed rocks, and sinking shingles, with no concern that my London feet ever and anon brought me to a hasty, unpremeditated sitting position in a diminutive pool, or on the edge of a flint. And the flower fairies (I know now there are fairies), and the shell fairies. and the ship fairies took my heart into their keeping, and poked fun at urban notions of natural laws. One day I went out on the rocks, and the sea stole all about me till I felt as one in the lap of the ocean. Every recollection of nasty things in a town pocket went from me, and nothing in the world seemed to matter but the sunshine, the salt spray of the waves,

IN AN IDLE HOUR

the scurrying of white-sailed ships out to sea, and the great idleness of the hour. Not even my bills! Or—. Never had Providence created such a vain, heartless, capricious, tyrannous young termagant, with the prettiest—

Suddenly I became aware of a circle of noisy little persons quite near me hot in discussion: and I knew they were fairies. They were tiny, and inexpressibly dainty, and one among them seemed very disconsolate. "I don't know," she said, with a delightful lisp which made me laugh—"I don't know what we shall do, for really hardly any one believes in us nowadays! What will become of us if things proceed in this way, since our very existence only depends on the credulous fancy of man? I think the Arranger of things might have made us more independent. It's so undignified. . . . It really is!"

"I don't know about undignified," said another sententiously—"nothing is undignified unless we consider it so; and after all, man's fancy is the best part of him, and he was made after the great Model!"

"In this age people's fancy is only prolific when detrimentally critical of others' conduct!" (I felt that was a distinct shot at me, but I wouldn't withdraw my criticism of *somebody's* conduct—not for all the fairies in the world.)

"I admit it seems a little awkward," she continued.

"Not in the least! We shall always have the children; and so long as men are men there will be children!"

"And women are women," put in a demure, pinkcheeked elf. She was no doubt thinking of female velocipedists. Her companions seemed to consider her stupid, for they took not the smallest notice of what she said.

- "So we need fear nothing," the other finished.
- "Only Modernity," quietly suggested the demure one.
- "What do you mean?" they all queried at once; and they looked angry and uncomfortable.
- "Modernity doesn't have real children!" There was a silence. "It has men and women in small size instead."
- "It's not sense!" said one, as a possible balm to their disquieted nerves.
- "But it's true," said the first contemplatively. I heard a little girl say when some nice person declared we talked to her from the blades of grass, that it was only the animalcules."
 - "How very ridiculous!"
- "Moreover, it is ceasing to be the fashion to have children at all. The outcome will be disastrous to us!"
 - " We shan't be the only sufferers!"
- "I never feel it is any consolation that others suffer too!" exclaimed my sententious friend.
 - "It won't last."
 - " Why?"
- "Because it's the fashion. Already I know of——"
 Then they all whispered together, which I thought
 was extremely inconsiderate of them, considering
 they were pretending they didn't know I was there.
 - "Really I don't see why we should trouble our heads about the children," was at last pronounced in a loud voice.

IN AN IDLE HOUR

"Well," said the second, "only the other day an old biologist was sitting alone in his study correcting some proofs, when I popped up on the table near the ink-pot. He looked at me with a smile. 'You've come rather late, madam," he said; 'but I always had a suspicion that you existed.'

"'Why, then,' I said, 'have you passed your time in trying to make every one disbelieve in the existence of everything you can't quite understand? How many times have you denied my existence, for instance?'

"'Don't you see, my dear lady, that you can't deny that which is not?'

"Of course I said that for an old gentleman of his age it was very wrong to shirk the serious question in that way. I explained it was circumventing.

"'Oh! it's all done in that way,' he answered.

"'What?' I asked.

"'That, to be sure,' he said, pointing to the MS. We all do it. . . . But I assure you,' he continued, 'I have always believed in you. We have given you different names, that is all; and the great crowd, you know, love new names. They think therein lives Science, and the uglier they are, the more they like them.' Then he rose and gave me a low bow, declaring he was my humble servant. He was very polite, and, according to him, Huxley and Spencer (there was a visible tremor at the mention of these names) and all the rest actually do believe in fairies, so we need not mind about the children; but, of course, one doesn't like to have to depend on scientific old gentlemen!"

"Nor to be called animalculæ."

Then the demure one raised her eyes: and the first look of them was strangely familiar to me. In their depths seemed to live all the love one had known and heard of in the world, and to flicker all the fun and humour of irresponsible childhood, and of the *understanding feminine*. "You have all forgotten," she murmured—"You have all forgotten the poet! His fancy is immortal! We shall live for ever!"

The others looked at her oddly, and then set to discussing the matter, as if they themselves had hit upon the truth, so that I could not help laughing, whereat they all scurried away. The demure one looked at me for a moment, and deliberately winked.

"Little creature!" I cried, but she was gone; and when I turned round there I saw—, well, it doesn't matter; only there she was, with her golden hair all straying from under her hat.

"I came to tell you that you were being caught by the tide, but I couldn't get here quick enough, so we are both caught!" she said.

"All the way from London! That's nice of you," I answered. "I shall have to carry you back, though—it isn't deep enough to swim, and I am sure the sea-fairies would trip you up out of love of your pretty ankles!"

She looked at me as if she'd like to go; but she couldn't—a stretch of blue water cut off her retreat.

"I think you have the influenza," she remarked quite seriously; but she had to let me carry her through.

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"As it Happened"

"As it Happened"

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RALFSTEINER came downstairs and found his way into the deserted coffee-room of the little Hotel Taillieur at so early an hour that the morning light had hardly penetrated the low windows, or dissipated the deep shadows which enveloped the recesses and corners of the narrow apartment. A sleepy waiter eyed the new-comer with no little dissatisfaction and some insolence. The shabby German was evidently a person of no consequence, and, though he had arrived with the English gentleman, he was probably a servant of some sort, and the good man had no intention of troubling himself about servants, especially since he was debarred from a little timely gossip by the exceedingly reticent demeanour of this one. German had vouchsafed no information concerning this same Englishman, the appearance of whom, late the previous evening, at this somewhat unfrequented little hostelry, had raised great excitement and questioning. Why had Monsieur, who was undoubtedly a milord travelling incognito, not taken up his abode at the Grand Hotel at hand? It was good luck to the Maison Taillieur; and mine host reckoned

vast advantages, not at once to be realized, from this turn of affairs. He decided that his rival, the owner of the *Grand*, would have to look about him; and, with the determination not to lack this important qualification of the innkeeper, he himself bustled about and created much commotion among the usually indolent staff of servants.

Ralfsteiner sat down, and after some few moments of vacant staring at the thick cup before him, began his early breakfast with the energy of one intending to make a good meal; nevertheless, the bread persistently stuck in his throat, and his efforts to swallow became more difficult at each mouthful. he assured himself that this little affair of Walter's was nothing, and that in any case a philosopher should be perfectly indifferent to such a matter, and need not be troubled during this morning repast because of it. But philosophy has never successfully conquered the affections, and Ralfsteiner was moved, and intensely moved, through his affections. is so trivial and even ridiculous when concerning others, is apt, when brought home, to become grave and terrible. It signifies little that the very question of duelling provokes a smile from the sensible, if some one very near and dear is to face the danger? A slight wound is the probable consequence, but death is a possible one, and that possibility alone confronts those interested till it generates the positive. The young journalist could not ponder on the death of his friend callously, much as he had schooled himself in the wise learning of indifference, so that at the noise of carriage wheels slowly approaching his heart beat. There was a terribly ominous sound

about the sluggish grating of those wheels, and the backing of the horse as it drew up at the door.

He hurried out, feeling, as he afterwards described it, "like a walking refrigerator." Walter was in the hall, and appeared perfectly self-possessed, which fact, instead of instilling some courage into our little friend, intensified, on the contrary, his apprehensions, and filled him with a superstitious sense that it was the worst possible sign.

During the drive Walter sat with none of the inward trepidation of his companion. He looked towards the horizon, and something in the great white heavens, still untinted, fascinated his attention. As they slowly mounted the hill, leaving the quaint crooked town at their feet, he became conscious of the predominance of the great atmosphere, its throbbing immensity and reigning quiet; the insignificance of the human habitations clustering below them; a phantasmal world of streets and houses, huddled together like black shadows in the great space, which seemed to have infinite importance in its cold whiteness not yet heated into colour by a sufficiently risen As they neared a wood the leaves of the tall birches quivered, as if in anticipation of the warmth to come.

He turned his eyes to Ralfsteiner and smiled. The queer little figure, buttoned up to the neck in a shining black cloth surtout, looked drolly pathetic, the more so because of his grim determination to appear unconcerned. It struck Walter that there was something lacking in the appearance of his friend which was wont to be there; he scanned him some time wondering what it was he missed, then realized

suddenly what was absent. Ralfsteiner's eyes were not twinkling. Ralfsteiner's eyes hitherto had always twinkled.

The carriage drew up, and they descended, and disappeared into the shadow of a wood. Some minutes later two men stood face to face, their arms lifted and figures erect.

It was a natural opening in the thicket, beautiful by day, though gloomy and uncanny at this early hour. The grass on which they stood looked grey, the small patch of sky above pitilessly white, the branches and foliage one monotone, whilst the trunks of the trees appeared startlingly, oppressively near, like countless phantoms striding from out of the darkness.

Two simultaneous reports echoed through the air, as a sudden ray of light sped across the heavens; an iridescent mist appeared on the edges of things, and gradually colour spread. The leaflets shimmered, and a hurrying breeze whispered an awakening to the trees and plants and insects. The birds broke out in chattering song, a squirrel scurried by, and life and warmth and joyousness took riotous possession. Only the figure of a prostrate man suggested anything of the preceding hour that is neither night nor day.

General de Courcelles, at the signal given, had raised his arm with no intention of seriously wounding his rival; perhaps he hardly considered him as such. He had perfect confidence in Jean West, and he was unable to imagine, at least at that moment, that she could regard this man with any other feelings

than those he himself possessed—contempt and pity. Walter Carroll, to the best of his knowledge, had behaved in a scoundrelly manner, pressed his attention on Miss West when he was openly engaged to Violet Seymore, and, because she had refused to listen, had forced this duel on himself by every insulting means he could conceive that would bring matters to such an end.

A famous shot himself, he was sure of his aim, and pointing his weapon some two or three inches to the right of his adversary, sufficiently near to disarm suspicion of shooting in the air, he fired.

The figure of Walter Carroll fell forward with the rigidity of one already dead.

Instantly three men hastened to the side of the prostrate man; then General de Courcelles felt a hand on his arm. "You had better come away at once, General; serious consequences will follow if you are apprehended!"

He turned, too shocked by the terrible issue of affairs to speak, and followed his companion through the narrow path to the outer road, where the carriage which had brought him waited. At the door he said, "Who could have foreseen that after forty years of a perfect record I should have missed my aim by two inches?"

The second stared with surprise at the seeming cold-blooded cruelty of this speech.

"Good God! are you not satisfied?"

The General looked at his friend a moment, and answered:—

"You misunderstand me!" then stepped into the carriage and drove away.

In after years the story was told of how a certain great shot, on killing his man, had complained that the bullet had entered two inches short of the spot he had covered.

The carriage sped down the white road, a black spot on the landscape. The old man sat with a strained. distressed expression which deepened as he tried to control the tumult of his thoughts. Helter-skelter they rushed through his brain unsummoned by him-The vision of the falling man, white and rigid, recurred at intervals bringing them to a standstill; then they sped on, seemingly to no purpose, and certainly with no consecutiveness. But a question every now and then confronted him with persistent reiteration, and as persistently he beat it back with trivial answers, or ignored its presence; nevertheless there crept stealthily into his heart the answer he dared not consider, and it took possession of his whole being at last with unabatable force, bringing with it a thousand doubts which clamoured for a hearing. He wrestled with them, laughed at them, and wrestled again; but the time in the carriage was long, and the vista of the quiet level lands, stretching far to the horizon, unwooded now, and poor in vegetation, with here and there a figure of a peasant clear against the sky stooping over his labour, afforded no distraction. He bowed his head in his hands to shut out For a moment he was at the vision of his brain. peace; then all became intensified; the white face of Jean West loomed out of the darkness, sad and reproachful, and the dead body lay between them, and he could not get to her-could not explain-"What have you done? What have you done?"

she seemed to say—"I loved him." No, Jean, not that, surely not that.

It was his last denial.

The dewy freshness of the morning air wafted in at the window as he raised his head. He stretched out his burning hands as if to catch its cool breath. Then he suddenly seized with eagerness the thought he had at first recoiled from, accepted but vague doubts as possible facts, analysed, questioned, cross-examined every insinuation, and laid bare those thoughts each of which was as a sword stabbing ruthlessly.

That he had not before thought even that she might love the man he himself had seen her repulse, was little argument against the possibility of such a state of affairs, and then, even though she had not loved his rival, he had loved her, and would not his death bring a revolution of feeling? At least would not she shrink from the hand which had caused his death! Thus the old man reasoned against himself, sat in judgment on himself, and condemned himself. He must lose Jean! His face turned white, and terrible in the stern controlled suffering of its expression. He must lose her . . . unless!

Unless! . .

General de Courcelles grasped at the idea that Jean might remain ignorant of what had occurred; this seemed so possible a solution of his difficulties that he determined to pursue a course of silence regarding the events of that morning.

Had he been a younger man, the primary misery would have been the fact that she loved Walter

Carroll better than himself, an insurmountable barrier to one twenty years his junior; but this idea, though at first crushing, he was able to accept, and still determine on the possession of the girl. This absorbing passion, coming to him after years of a life spent in almost ascetic lovelessness, would brook no sentimental sacrifice: and throughout the rest of his journey, the end of the drive, the hour or two passed waiting at the hotel previous to the departure of the boat for Dover, those, while pacing the deck as the steamer pushed through the grey sullen waves, the brief journey in the express to London, his thoughts were absorbed in the feverish consideration of how best he could keep his secret, and the formation of necessary plans to disarm suspicion. He did not waver once in his decision, or give in to the hope that chance might save him from the degradation of dissembling, but deliberately pondered out every possible occurrence, and circumvented with fox-like cunning each situation till cognisant of its minutest details.

His first resolve was to hasten to her studio, and by his presence allay any fears she might have entertained during the short duration of his absence.

Four and twenty hours had scarcely elapsed since he had left her, and yet it seemed hardly the same man who approached the baize door and faced Bridget. The serving woman was so surprised at the change in him that she made no answer to his inquiry, but held the door open for him to pass. His ill-controlled agitation did not escape her. She omitted to inform her mistress of his arrival, and followed him to the fire-place in which a low fire was burning, a strange occurrence, since the weather was quite warm. The

General was too preoccupied to notice anything unusual, and mechanically watched the old woman stir something in a small pot on the fire. He was glad he had not found Jean immediately. She was in—he would see her in a moment, there was no hurry, though he had hastened, and every slight delay had made his heart beat with sickening impatience; but he needed some moments now before facing her, a last reconsideration of the deplorable truth, and of the dangerous path he had chosen, leading to a maze of intricate ways, the only outlets of which must be through the gates of sin. He did not flinch, self respect must go, but the delay was welcome.

Bridget turned her eyes keenly on him from time to time as if she were about to speak, and then compressed her lips. On each occasion she was surprised out of her own thoughts by the spectacle of the unhappy man, appalled by some calamity of which she knew nothing. At last he looked up, and inquired if Miss West were really in, and receiving a somewhat half-hearted affirmative, he relapsed again into silence. To-day Bridget looked more than ever like a witch in a fairy tale. Her sandy hair, so peculiarly streaked with white, stuck out in an untidy knob, her clothes clung to her with the picturesque persistency of drapery that had not been removed for some time: the base of her withered scraggy neck ended in the folds of a drab handkerchief with little difference of tone and close continuity of line; indeed her bodice might have been sculptured on her person, so well used was it to its homely creases. She wore a very formidable expression, and the General, as he watched her, decided that she was about to give forth some

information of importance, but that she intended taking her time, and that she would continue to stir the contents of her pot with aggravating regularity was evident. Like many other good persons, Bridget could chatter unremittingly when she had nothing of import to say, and, on the other hand, remain oppressively silent when she knew her speech was of utmost account.

"What are you stirring in that pot?" he inquired.

"Gruel! but it's herself that won't touch it after all," she murmured.

He rose. "Will you say that I am here?"

"I might say it a dozen times it would make no sort o' difference." This response was given so casually that General de Courcelles hardly noticed what she said, when the incoherent murmurings of a voice in pain penetrated the room.

He turned sharply to Bridget. "She is ill?"

"Yes," said Bridget snappily, and went on stirring.

General de Courcelles entered his club late that

evening. A telegram waited him; he opened it eagerly, read its contents, then folded it up into its shiny envelope, and thrust it into his pocket.

Jean West stirred restlessly, then lay quiet. The first thought that hurried through her mind on this returning to consciousness was, that after all she had not accepted General de Courcelles! And the thankfulness that sprang from the thought brought a smile to her mouth before she had opened her eyes. She was still free, and that other lover with whom she had

quarrelled was free too. Surely things would right themselves yet. She opened her eyes, and her heart sank; for this awakening was only another delirious fancy, another of those feverish dreams which cheated, and worried, and seemed to fill up an eternity of time, holding her consciousness, though she had strained every nerve to free herself from their mocking unreality. She bit her lips from weary vexation, and tried to force the vision from her sight by a process of energetic staring. It was a dream. she knew it was a dream; otherwise what wonderful room was this with its soft silk hangings, and the great silver bowl of roses at her feet? Who had changed her worn drab counterpane for the rich satin quilt, the down of which yielded to the slightest touch of her hand? And the stately four-posted erection above her head, how had it risen from her narrow little iron bedstead? She felt like a queen and sighed. Was that ancient dame sitting some way off the lady of the bedchamber? Where had she seen her face before? Somewhere, but she could not recollect where. Why did she grin at her in that absurd way? Why didn't she speak? No, it was a dream-it was all ridiculous. The edge of the sheet was embroidered, and there were scent bottles on the dressing-table! She had never used scent bottles in her life. She closed her eyes and the wonderful room vanished in an untroubled, dreamless sleep.

When she came to consciousness again, it was with the sense of renewed life and freedom from the pressure of pain. It seemed a luxury to lie quite still, with closed eyes, and breathe the fresh air which

passed in gentle currents across her face. had no doubt opened the window, the little high window over her bed. She herself must have been very ill, and-Pooh! she would not trouble to think! it was so nice, so delicious just to be; and, smiling to herself, she opened her eyes lazily. * * * She shut them instantly. It was too annoying, she had seen the great room again! What fantastic trick of dreamland was this, which did not even try to deceive It was evident to herself that she was only dreaming. Really! dull realism was very well in art and fiction; but if one was to be bothered with it in dreams it was too much! She tried again, opening her eyes wide and fixing them with the determination to see nothing but her own little room. It was of no use; there was the silver bowl of roses, and the expansive blue satin quilt.

"Am I awake or not?" she exclaimed, with all the energy she could muster.

"Am I awake, or do I dream?" echoed a soft, tremulous voice. "Don't say another word; I'll write a poem on that!"

Jean turned in surprise, and discovered the little old lady whom she had missed seeing on re-wakening, because the little old lady's head was on such a very low level. She was seated on the floor—actually seated on the floor, surrounded on all sides by piles of manuscripts. In front of her was a small tin trunk evidently full of them, and in her hand a foolscap quire of paper being reduced to a similar condition.

Jean could not help smiling; it was the funniest, oddest spectacle she had ever seen. "I made a mis-

take," she thought with amusement; "she is not 'the lady of the bedchamber,' but the 'Court scribe.'" She was certainly very old, but also excessively pretty, with none of the wizen, haggard look of old age; if, when she smiled, her face puckered up into wrinkles, they were soft, full wrinkles, rather pleasant than otherwise. Her figure was still young in appearance, though her hands, which were covered with rings, showed great age. She had a fair smooth skin, and light chestnut hair. Her agility was remarkable. Age and youth seemed to be one in her. She sat muttering some time, applying her pencil vigorously; on finishing, she looked up with a smile and blush, which were ridiculously girlish, then proceeded in a sweet, pathetic voice to recite the verses written.

They seemed very charming to Jean; perhaps they were somewhat mixed in metaphor, but to demand anything else in a dream was surely to be hypercritical! and poetry written from the floor, probably started with a different point of view. However, the little poetess did not seem quite satisfied with her last line, and after some stumbling she stuffed her manuscript into the trunk, and, springing to her feet, came airily to Jean's side.

"Well, so you are better," she said, with a quaint, patronising smile. "So you thought you were dreaming! Well, you know, you have been talking such a lot of nonsense, but I have made ever so much poetry out of it. That's all mine," and she flourished her hand in the direction of the scattered papers; "I have heaps more. Well, I am glad you are better; when you are quite well I shall recite you some more of my rubbish, but you mustn't talk—the doctor said

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you were not to talk at all. And what do you think of me?"

"I think you are very nice, and pretty, and amusing," said Jean quite seriously.

Her companion smiled, shrugged her shoulders, and blushed; then, with all the comicality in the world expressed in her face, said:—

"Well, you're not a beauty ye'self, are you?"

Jean ignored this rather rude speech, as it was given in such charming good humour.

"They have made a great fuss over you," her companion continued in the same jocose tone; "I am not sure you are worth it."

"My bed's worth a lot, though," answered the girl with a laugh. The old lady laughed too, shook with laughing, her funny little body heaving up and down; then she grew suddenly serious, as if so much hilarity over such a fine bed was improper. "It really was very expensive," she said, with confiding seriousness, which was irresistibly comic; Jean laughed outright, though she was very much afraid it would offend her companion, but the gay little woman took it in excellent part, and laughed again till the tears streamed down her cheeks.

"I really don't know what we are laughing at,

But a little nonsense now and then Is relished by the wisest men.'

And now I am going to leave you!"

"But please before you go will you tell me---?"

"Nothing of the sort! You have talked more than is good for you—adieu—here's nurse!" and with a patronising nod and smile she tripped away, being

replaced by a very tall, serious-looking person in a grey gown and white cap, who moved silently about the room, and handled everything with set purpose and assured right, that was peculiarly aggravating. Jean wished her away and the quaint old lady back again. There was something formidable in this person, as there is in every one who wears a uniform; they seem to assume a certain importance which lacks individuality, and in common with the wigged judge, or brass-buttoned railway guard, they inspire one with a fear to question them, or at least a necessity of catching one's breath before doing so.

Jean had a thousand things she wished to ask, but she dared not be so familiar with that genteel white cap and apron. She turned on her pillow and let her thoughts run as they would; when the nurse approached her she feigned sleep.

At last she was left alone; she lay still for some time, her eyes wide open, taking in every detail of the gorgeous apartment: then she sat up and slipped out of bed. There was a blue wrapper, lined with pink quilted silk, hanging on a chair; she eyed it for a moment, a little bit afraid to handle such a wonderful looking garment; but the cold had no respect for such scruples, and forced her to seek protection. She struggled into it, and proceeded with a great sense of adventure to steer her way across the room to some big white doors which had not been opened by either the nurse or the old lady; but the effort proved greater than she had anticipated, and she sank down into a chair, astonished to find herself so weak and exhausted after so little exertion: she pacified herself with the self-assurance that dreams were like that,

one was always trying to do what one couldn't. She reached the handle of the door without rising, and flung it open with a childish impetuosity. It led into a room somewhat the same size as the one she was in, and furnished as a boudoir. Everything was in pale blue and gold, and though a fire burned in a grate, there were no signs of any recent occupation; the chairs were stiffly arranged, and had an air of not desiring to be sat upon; a big fat Louis XVI. one presided over the rest with its well-strained brocade, the pattern of which had all the expression of a florid self-satisfied human face, at least so Jean thought as she sat peering in. She was amused, and excited, and after a few moments, rose and dragged herself across the polished floor, clinging to chairs and tables at odd moments. She had much difficulty in reaching the centre, and nearly fell several times. Dream feet were certainly unwieldy heavy appendages! Her surroundings seemed far more substantial than herself—She was the unreality! If the moment came for anything to vanish, she felt she would certainly be the first. Such thin white limbs were ridiculous substitutes for legs-the old lady was quite right in calling her ugly. She raised her eyes to a picture over the mantelshelf: a portrait of an officer in uniform; then the amusement vanished from her face, and in its stead came an expression of questioning which gradually changed into recognition and then horror. It was the key: the answer to this fantastic dream: she was not dreaming! It was all real, horribly real! She stood still, her eyes fixed on the portrait. As the torrents of recollection fled through her mind, she tried to recall the past and realize the present; but what she

wished most to remember was the most vague; one fact only was clear, and that the most difficult to accept. She was in the house of General de Courcelles! But why? An indefinite remembrance came to her of walking up the aisle of a church—the clanking of bells in her ears the while, and she had thought it was a dream! Now she remembered where she had seen the old lady—she had taken part in the strange ceremony.—Then she was married to General de Courcelles! She flushed scarlet at the thought, and her lips curled with sudden resentment.

The nurse found her standing in the middle of the room, a look of awful pain in her fixed eyes. The woman hastened to her side and begged her to return at once to her room, blaming herself for having left her; but the girl took no notice of what she said, and remained still, looking intently with her great big eyes at her companion. She was trying to frame her question in a way that would not sound hopelessly ridiculous, and she found it a feat beyond her powers; she stammered confusedly, "Of course I understand I have been ill, and I expect I am not quite right yet, but would you mind telling me what my name is?"

A look of dismay crossed the attendant's face. She promptly proceeded to lift the girl up bodily in her arms and bear her off to the inner room. Jean did not resist, she allowed herself to be put in bed, the sheets put straight, her pillow knocked up, and silent admonition delivered in the expressive countenance of the herculean attendant, before she spoke again. She was very glad to be back in bed; the comfort and warmth made her feel rather inclined to cry, but she determined to ask her question first.

Again the nurse looked distressed and compressed her lips. She seemed to be questioning herself as to the expedience of sending for the doctor. Her patient, who had taken such a decided turn for the better, was undoubtedly worse, and it was her own fault for having left her charge alone. Jean realized this and sympathised, knowing in truth that she was on the contrary much better; nevertheless, the sense of anxiety predominated, and provoked by the woman's silence, she said with really vicious energy,

"If you don't tell me my name, I will jump out of bed and run all over the house till I find somebody a little reasonable!"

- " My poor child!" said the woman.
- "Whose is this house? What is my name?"
- " It is Mrs. Wentford's!"
- "General de Courcelles' sister's?"
- "Yes."
- "And my name—Ah! say it's not De Courcelles—say it's not De Courcelles!"
 - "No, no; Miss West, come lie still a little."

Π

Jean and Mrs. Wentford were together in the boudoir, the former propped up with pillows in a low chair, her feet resting on a stool. The warm air wafted in gentle streams through the open window, just enough to disturb some rose leaves on a table, and lightly lift the fringe of a heavy drapery on the couch. A blue and white awning shielded the room from the immediate rays of the sun, and an abundance

of flowers on the wide balcony caught the breeze by the way, so that it entered laden with their fragrance.

Jean from her place could see, through the interstices of the balustrade, the green grass of the park, and glimpses of blue sky above: she caught a faint hum of the traffic below, faint enough to be pleasant: and though the voice of her companion rose and fell with a certain sadness as she related the pathetic story of her brother's past, it fell on Jean's hearing with a sense of luxury—the girl felt touched, but luxuriously touched: now and then she forgot the old lady was speaking, and only caught the murmuring of a musical voice. It was all deliciously soothing. She was entirely dominated by an animal delight in mere existence. This returning to strength with hardly any memory of the near past, and the consciousness of an exquisite kindness and care at hand, and luxury ad libitum-novel enough experience to her-was intoxicating; and though she went through moments of trepidation, moments of realizing something of a sad past, she possessed neither the strength nor desire to grasp it.

She knew she had been ill—brain fever they said: she gathered that General de Courcelles had brought her to his sister, Mrs. Wentford, to be taken care of. She had quarrelled with Walter, she couldn't remember much why; only that it had been very serious—about Violet, surely, and she herself had accepted the General in the heat of that miserable moment, when, without Walter Carroll, the thought of continuing the solitary struggle at the studio had been intolerable. That terrible scene between the two men had followed: the passionate rage of the

one, and the other's chivalrous protective control. Who could have dreamed that this Violet was Walter's cousin? Or that the little drop of southern blood would set him to fighting duels? Her thoughts grew vague again, and she tried to catch Mrs. Wentford's words.

Mrs. Wentford was a charming little widow, who adored her brother, and was given to the writing of verse. She had been oddly familiar at their first interview—talked as if she were a contemporary of Jean's, and suggested, with perfect simplicity, that she had 'admirers yet; she emphasised the yet with a certain expression that commanded a protest. Jean was convinced she was sixty, and did not dare respond to the hint; but latterly, when used to her hostess's extraordinary juvenility of mind, and even physique, the girl never failed to deal in fitting assurances of the little old lady's youth, beauty, fascination, and talent, getting used as every one else did, when with Mrs. Wentford, to accept her wrinkles and age as mere accidental details.

Jean became conscious that the voice had ceased: she was not quite sure how long, and she had to make an effort to gather together the threads of a story she had only half heard. It had been sad, but somehow strangely unreal, perhaps because of her own lack of attention, or because the still restful morning, in the dainty scented room, would take no count of tragedy. Going over the ground again she realized that it was her benefactor whom all this concerned, and that he, whose youth was described by Mrs. Wentford as having been only pregnant with bitterness and sorrow, whose manhood had been

weighed down by grievous unmerited humiliations and shocking wrongs, and who had through all remained brave, generous, upright, and uncomplaining, was indeed the white-haired old man, her good friend, and now her destined husband—Husband! The word sounded strange to her, bearing no signification of love—that which concerned love was locked up in the past. Walter was there somewhere, but the key was turned, and she had no strength yet, or conscious desire to force the lock. She nursed "what had been" with the lid closed, and suffered the present to be all absorbing.

"Pooh!" said the little woman gaily, "it's all right now the story is going to end well!"

Jean turned her head. Mrs. Wentford was perched on the arm of a sofa—she had great perching proclivities—her feet rested on a chair, and her hands doubled with energy into a velvet cushion by her side: the action was vividly alive, and Jean marvelled at the extreme nervous strength in the whole physique of the little old lady.

"You are his good angel. You will make up for all the rest!" she smiled.

"Yes," Jean answered vaguely; then followed from her companion a look of intense scrutiny, a look which seemed to dive into the inmost thoughts of the girl—weigh them, whilst forcing the scale—suspect them wanting, yet forbidding it. Jean felt the power. Strife was in the air. She did not understand why. She felt she had a side, but convalescence shrinks from strife, and moreover she did not know her side: she was dimly aware that she was to make a sacrifice; but she could not think of it now. The look made

her impatient; it seemed cunning. It was evident to Jean that this woman would leave no stone unturned if the question of her brother's happiness were at stake: her devotion to him had the passion of motherhood, and something of the cruelty born of it. What is your sacrifice to me, since he demands it! The girl felt very tired, and would have closed her eyes.

"But if you fail?" The tone was tremulous; Jean looked up again. There were tears in Mrs. Wentford's eyes, and her hands were shaking: she looked a thousand years old. The effect these tears produced was terrible, and strange enough it was only age, not grief they suggested: the expression was childish on the countenance of a hundred years old; the strength she had shown a few moments before was entirely gone.

"It is your duty," she continued with tyrannous weakness, "to give all for his sake."

"Of course, of course," said Jean soothingly. She crossed over to her and pressed her hands. The face of the little poetess relaxed, she smiled, and descending to the ground, shook her skirts, seeming to discard, with the action, all moodiness. Responsibility fell from her like a superfluous wrap; her next remark resembled a chirp. Jean laughed. Mrs. Wentford was a continual surprise.

Unconsciously the girl took up the fallen wrap.

During the following days no allusion was made to the morning's conversation, and nothing but impersonal matters were discussed; nevertheless Jean found herself dwelling persistently on the tragic story of General de Courcelles' youth, and pitying

the sufferer, until, with that great big heart of hers, she longed to atone for a wrong she had taken no part in. At least her duty in one thing was clearshe would fulfil the promise so hastily given; nothing, nothing, would deter her from that, and she sighed. It would be so much easier when she was stronger, not guessing that, on the contrary, with physical strength the capacity for moral suffering is intensified, that strengthened memory would recall the past, and vitalized imagination realize the future: that the weakling will accept any state of affairs so long as he or she is cherished and preserved from immediate pain. The great big house was like a fairy palace to Jean, and not only the actual luxury was delightful, but particularly so the sense of protection —hitherto quite inexperienced by her. In a society where independence in a girl may be permitted, but is hardly tolerated, the sense of longing for protection which creeps into the heart of a sensitive girl, living an emancipated existence in poverty, is intense.

"Ah! nurse," she said one day to that stalwart guardian, "I am shamelessly demoralized."

"We particularly like our patients to be demoralized," she answered,

"You take our souls away!"

"That's our secret! A good nurse never permits her patients to have a soul. We take possession of it, you know, and lock it up in a little box, and return it by post when they are quite well."

Jean laughed. "Do you ever send the wrong one?" she said drolly.

"We try to; it's the best of all remedies. It teaches foolish persons to look at life from another

point of view. Nothing's so good for the body as a moral change of aspect."

I have a way of seeing things from so many points of view—from others' points—that I lose my own, and grow sorry when I should be angry, and angry when I should be sorry."

"What do you mean?"

"Ah! I don't know. My thoughts are so muddled. There's a black thought somewhere, and it comes to me now and then, and I understand it all, and then it goes—goes, and I can't remember." She laughed and crouched up against the nurse coaxingly.

"Open the box. Give it me."

"No, I can still only allow you to have a body. You are not nearly well enough yet."

"Meanwhile my poor thoughts go wandering about, and everything seems strange because my soul is not there to answer."

"No, no, you must not think. You see how useless it is whilst I have the care of your soul. I forbid you to think."

"Ah! give me back my soul. Indeed I am quite well—I want to know so many things." A troubled look crept into her eyes.

"In time—in time," said the nurse.

Bridget was her first visitor. The interview was touching enough, and with it brought recollections which woke a secret sense in Jean that things would go harder than she had thought. The sight again of the old servant, with her homely, wrinkled face and ridiculously antiquated costume, was delightful. The girl poked fun at her bonnet, then pinched her fingers between her own; she made her sit in all the most

comfortable seats in the room, and laughed outright at the good creature's absolute indifference to the gorgeous surroundings.

"Ah! you are not so easily demoralized as I am," she said, and she wondered if she were really demoralized. She clutched at the pretext: Bridget thought so. The Irish woman would have carried her young mistress off bodily had she had her way, and the girl felt a sneaking inclination to be kidnapped. It was momentary, but strong enough to frighten her.

"My dear Bridget," she persisted, "you see how strong I am getting—and they have been so kind. We must not be ungrateful."

Bridget answered nothing, but sat stolidly staring; then said suddenly in her peculiar irrelevant way, "So she's married!"

- "Who?" asked Jean.
- "Miss Violet Seymore herself to Mr. Reginald Wortly."
- "Reggie Wortly," Jean echoed in a very low voice. Then they were silent for some moments.
- "It does not matter," she said, and there was an odd expression in her eyes.

General de Courcelles had been assiduous in sending flowers and fruit and kind messages; he had not yet asked for an interview. On Jean being installed at 35, he had lived at the club, nominally taking his meals there; but during her sickness he was invariably in the house, either sitting in the library, his head in his hands, or pacing the passage outside her

door. He watched the ingress and egress of those nursing her, guessing the news by their expression, but, nevertheless, pressing for confirmatory assurances. It was a pathetic figure, this white-headed old man restlessly hovering about the staircase and halls through the silent hours of the night. When the sound of her delirium reached him he would remain quite still, straining an ear to catch the echo of words, the burden of which had grown so familiar to him. Then he would steal away like a maimed creature; anxiety would bring him back, and a reiteration of the torture continued hour after hour. Walter—Walter—it was nothing but Walter he heard; the air became impregnated with the poor girl's cry.

She had grown better, and he, in his humble thankfulness, had waited patiently till she should wish to see him—till she should express some desire. Strange enough the waiting had not been hard: he heard reports of her cheerfulness, he received kind messages from her, and, after the long suspense, things seemed as if they would go well. She had made no mention of Mr. Carroll since her recovery—might it not be that those ravings were but delirium, and not the reflex of her mind? With such hopes he contented himself and waited.

She sent for him: Mrs. Wentford brought the news into the library, her little face glowing with excited satisfaction. The General stood hat in hand; he stammered a response. The little woman noticed that his hands trembled; she closed the door, and flitted about the room with apparent carelessness, dropping a remark now and then as to Jean's complete re-

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covery, her cheerfulness and evident desire to see him. The General hardly heard; he was only conscious of a sudden feeling of sickness, of overwhelming fatigue. He dared not move; he thrust his hand in his pocket; his fingers came in contact with the smooth surface of a thin paper envelope. He crumpled it fiercely, and made a step towards the door.

"Why not see her after lunch?" said Mrs. Wentford. He turned a ghastly face to her. "What nonsense! I will go now"; but he remained standing some moments, then walked with heavy, shambling steps from the room. Little Mrs. Wentford sat down on the edge of a broad leather-covered chair; her toes hardly reached the ground. She would have swung them just a little, only that she felt very unhappy and lonely. She had thought he would be so pleased. but on the contrary he had displayed misery and consternation in the hurried look at her. There was something which was eating away the heart of her brother—something that was weighing him down, and she had failed to discover the cause, or alleviate his pain with all her efforts. In these two months he had aged unnaturally, and his moods were such as she had never known in him before. What could she do? How could she help him? It seemed hopeless! Evidently she was no use any more in the world; she hummed a little tune to keep the tears of wretchedness from gathering in her eyes, and waited till he might return.

She heard his footsteps cross the hall. Surely he would come in! But he passed, and the street door banged! The little woman sprang up and hastened to Jean to learn something of their interview.

"He looks so ill," said Jean questioningly, "I felt ashamed of professing to anything but robust health. I longed to offer him my chair," she went on with an attempt at gaiety, but Mrs. Wentford saw the girl was really shocked.

"It has been all the anxiety about you, you know. He was up every night."

"Ah! Mrs. Wentford, does General de Courcelles love me so much?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"The duel was forced upon him," she said suddenly.

"What duel?" exclaimed Mrs. Wentford.

The girl hesitated. "The duel we are all forced to take part in!" She rose from her seat and came over to her companion's side. "There is no such thing as right and wrong, it is only all wrong—not wicked, but all wrong, wrong—muddled. We can do nothing but bind up each other's wounds. Some of us do that, and then tear them open and go mad at the sight of blood; others tear their own open and die for the loss of it. We are apt to think we are the only ones bleeding. They are all bleeding. Some of them dance to hide it, steal to hide it, sin to hide it; but it's there—they are not wicked, only bleeding."

"You mad thing, what are you talking about?" gasped Mrs. Wentford.

"You want me to marry your brother!"

"You must marry my brother!"

"I will do it; but listen, it fills me with horror—it is unnatural, revolting; I shrink with all the strength of my nature. Do you hear?"

"What do you mean? This is absurd. You are ill!"

"No; only well at last. I was not well before; but do not be afraid." She knelt down and took both the old lady's hands in hers. "You know I am sorry for him, sorry till my heart almost breaks. He did not tell me, but I know it; and ah! it is terrible! but I am sorry, sorry for him."

Mrs. Wentford was frightened; the hands of the invalid were clutching her own; she could not free herself, and the white face and wide-open eyes painfully held her attention. The girl leant her head forward. "He killed him!" Then she rose and returned to the sofa.

Mrs. Wentford, who had comprehended nothing, followed her and covered up her feet in silence; she felt sure Jean was delirious, caused by her present weak state, and by the excitement of seeing General de Courcelles.

It was only three days! three days more of restless waiting; then things for ever would be settled. Jean during this time of waiting had done her utmost not to think. Such a resolution as she had taken would hardly bear meditating on. The great pity alive in her heart for the old man left no room for self-commiseration; she could suffer, but to see suffering in others was intolerable to her, and the intense desire to allay it overpowered all other emotions.

Pity with this girl was a passion, and she became blind to personal affliction. Jean had hardly admitted to herself that the old man had killed Walter

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Carroll, and yet she was acting as if such were the case. If he had killed him, she was convinced he had never intended it. That he was remorseful was evident by the unaccountable expression of distress lately visible in the look of his kind eyes. She had promised to be his wife before the thing had happened. He had been forced into it, he had fought for her -this insane duel. Fate had thrown the terrible consequences on him whose whole life had seemed but filled with a succession of unmerited sorrows. Was she to add still another drop to his cup of bitterness because her heart was aching too? On the contrary, she only realized that there was sorrow and wretchedness about, and that she had no right to desert those who were most afflicted. It was unnatural and revolting to marry one who had killed the man she had loved, but that was her pain—to relinquish was to inflict pain on the most lonely and most unhappy of men: she longed to go to him and take from him the misery she knew was weighing him down. She would have cried out that which leapt every moment in her heart: "Ah! you have killed him, and it is killing you! I am so sorry, so sorry for you. You think I would hate you if I knew; but I do not, I do not-I am only so sorry." She was stayed from this by the fact that so far she had no proof that Walter Carroll was dead, and that an explanation with General de Courcelles must certify this; she could not, she dare not hear it said.

To many, the character of Jean may seem almost revolting, and perhaps under such circumstances hardly any of us would have acted similarly; but the few may see the brave beauty of disposition in one

whose heart was so full of pity that she forgot herself, and to use her simile, tore off the bandages of her own wounds to bind the wounds of her neighbour.

She slipped the emerald ring off her thin hands for one afternoon of forgetfulness. She came downstairs dressed for the drive. Mrs. Wentford was going to a concert, and Jean was to drop her. The little lady was already seated in the brougham as she came down the steps. The girl was beautifully dressed; she looked very pale and unutterably sad. She settled in her seat, tucking the rich folds of her train about her feet. The footman banged the door and sprung to his place, and the carriage rolled almost noiselessly through the crowded way. She caught glimpses of the green of the park through the window, and the Row. The Row she knew so little about-the extravagantly dressed women, and idle men! In three days she would enter for ever into their world. She shivered; but this afternoon she would go back into her own for a few short hours.

Mrs. Wentford was duly dropped at Prince's Hall; Jean gave the order to drive to Mountfort studios. It is difficult to describe her sensations on alighting, and making her way up the dismal stone staircase and down the long corridor. The face of everything was familiar enough; but it all wore a new aspect to her which had a strangeness and sadness. She was almost frightened—it was the past, and she was no longer of it. She pushed open the door of the studio, and stood peering in. The old servant who had been left in charge had neglected everything excepting just the table and chair in immediate use. The place was covered with dust, and a stream of

afternoon sunlight pouring right across the roof through a window she usually kept screened, made the most familiar objects look unreal and strange. She entered slowly. Her silk skirt rustled on the boards; the sound startled her. She sat down on the throne. A paint-box was lying open near; strewn about were bent and contorted tubes, begrimed with each other's colour. There was the large one which contained flake white; she had pressed and squeezed it to get the last of its contents, trying to force the lead casing to yield more than it possessed—and the prussian blue, which would persistently ooze out of the wrong end, and the well-filled tube of chrome vellow, a colour she never used. Would she ever have the heart to paint again? She picked up a brush and pressed its bristles between her finger and thumb—it was a favourite brush! How carefully she had always washed it herself! Her eyes fell on the lay figure. What a dejected air it hadgood old friend! She rose: a pile of dusty canvases leant their face to the wall; a small one was carelessly jammed between two others-she released it with her foot; it fell on the ground face upwards. It was a rough sketch of Walter Carroll—one of her first of him. She turned abruptly away and went up the stairs into her bedroom. She sat down on the edge of the bed; the sun came through the narrow window high up in the wall, throwing the rest of the room into fanciful shadows; through the door she could still see the canvas lying face upwards. She buried her head in her hands: her thoughts stole back to the father who had died there, just where she was sitting, and left her alone to

fight the battle: then the tears crept through her fingers.

Some one stirring in the studio made her rise, and with the idea that it was Bridget, she lingered in the room, giving it a last look, then came down the steps slowly.

Instead of Bridget she saw a little man in a black shiny coat, struggling to get hold of a small painting of herself which hung out of his reach.

Jean was so surprised that she did not speak until this respectable-looking thief had attained his object, and was making away with it.

"Stop!" she said.

He hesitated, but did not turn round.

"What are you doing?"

"I beg your pardon," the man answered confusedly, still with his back to her, and clutching his possession determinedly. His voice was low and soft, and Jean thought she discerned something of a foreign accent. She wondered what his face was like, and advanced nearer to him. He made a step towards the door.

"Will you put that down?"

" No!"

The blood leapt to her face.

"I command you to put that down instantly."

"I am extremely sorry, but I---"

"You are taking away my property."

" I am not."

"Then may I ask what you are doing?"

He turned round. "You embarrass and annoy me! Why can't you leave things alone?"

She laughed. "That's just what I want you to do!

Really you are a very amusing thief, but not very clever—and now you may go."

But to her amazement he sat down deliberately, and compressing a pair of very full lips, he twinkled at her, absolutely cool. "You accuse me of being a thief," his whole demeanour seemed to express. "Very well, I don't care a fig!"

Jean hardly knew what to say. She could not help being amused at the quaint audacity of the funny little stranger; but, nevertheless, she felt frightened and embarrassed.

"I did not expect to find you here; I did not wish to see you," he said, after scanning her in silence. Again the low, soft quality of his voice struck her. He went on slowly, "I heard you were away, and that a good woman was left in charge: I received no answer to my knock, so concluded she was out."

"And you proceeded to appropriate my things!"

"Why do you not say steal, Miss West?" At the mention of her name Jean blushed; she was beginning to feel very uncomfortable.

"You have said it," she answered haughtily.

He gave an unpleasant laugh, and passed his hand through a mass of tow-coloured hair.

"I think if you throw your memory back you will realize that this picture is not your property! However, I was stealing, as you call it, for him whose peace of mind you have stolen with little hesitation—whose life you endangered for your own amusement." He leant back, folded his hands on his knees, and looked steadily at her, delivering this strange speech without any apparent indignation or anger. That he

meant to admonish even, was far from conveyed in his discoursive tone.

"What do you mean?" she said gently.

"This, I believe, is the property of Mr. Walter Carroll," he continued, ignoring her question. "He sent me for it. As I have said, I had no idea of seeing you here, and did not wish for this meeting. With your permission I will take it, and I apologise for the intrusion." He got up.

"Then he is alive?" she said.

Ralfsteiner turned sharply on her. His complaisant indifference vanished, and his whole face and attitude bore the look of surprise and attention, with a touch of incredulity in the parting of his lips.

"You did not think he was dead?" he said.

She looked at him for a moment, then turned her eyes away. Yes, now she knew her lover was alive she had to acknowledge to herself that during these past weeks, down in her heart, she had believed him dead; she had crushed the thought, ignored its presence, but now, at the great joy that bounded within her on learning of his safety, she knew how real had been her anxiety. Only on dropping the burden did she understand the weight of it.

"Yes," she said, and noted the look of disgust which crossed his face. She divined his thoughts—it was horrible to him—it was horrible to her now—he must condemn her—she condemned herself. Nothing she could say could alter the situation; her own thoughts would stand as witnesses against her: only those thoughts which never form themselves in words even to the inner mind—the thought that is never explained—the inexpressible pleaded not

guilty. She watched him, conscious of what he would say, wishing him to say it quickly, that she might beg some news of Walter.

"And you were going to marry the man you thought had killed your lover?" he demanded bitterly.

She did not speak.

"Good Good!" he exclaimed in a sudden passion, and turned away from her. She is horrible, he thought; her beautiful, good face is a lie. It's a mask which hides what the damned would shrink from seeing. I won't take her picture; he shall forget her. Poor chap! and he made me promise. Ah! let me get away from this—she's a devil. I shall go now. Have her portrait! No, certainly not! He faced her.

"Damn it!" he said, and seizing the picture, he made for the door.

She watched him in silence. Her heart beat quicker as he opened the door, and his quaint broad figure was silhouetted against the light from the passage: the green baize was about to close on him and all she longed passionately to hear—some news, some little news of him.

"Mr. Ralfsteiner!"

He hesitated. She came quickly up to his side.

- "Will you tell me how Mr. Carroll is?"
- "He is better!"
- "Has he been very ill?"
- " He was dangerously wounded."
- "Ah—he is quite well now?"
- "Quite! He leaves to-morrow for Australia, where he intends to settle." There was a triumphant tone in Ralfsteiner's speech; she noticed and recoiled a

little from him. She began to fasten her glove: he made a step forward: every drop of blood left her face.

"You are a great friend of his; I—I remember your name quite well," she stammered, in reckless endeavour to detain him.

"Yes."

"You know I am to be married the day after tomorrow."

"I heard it." Again he made a movement to go. She held out her hand; the corners of her mouth trembled.

"Good-bye, Mr. Ralfsteiner; you won't think too unkindly of me!"

"Good-bye," he said, but still held her hand. He looked at the sad, forlorn face and the lovely pathetic eyes raised to his, then all resentment and distrust went, and a passionate desire filled him to serve her in some way; but he was ashamed of his emotion, counting it weakness, and inwardly blamed her for craft. She disengaged her hand and turned hurriedly away. He followed her up the long corridor and down the stone steps to the front. A brougham was waiting. He opened the door for her, and as she got in he noticed that her face had turned quite white, that her lips were firmly set, and her eyes extraordinarily bright. Again pity engulfed all other feelings, and he said kindly,—

" Is there anything I can do?"

"Yes," she answered hurriedly, placing her hands on the little picture; "let me have this."

Hardly conscious of what he was doing, he held it out; her expression did not change.

"And now will you give the coachman Mr. Carroll's address?"

They had formally shaken hands; but now she stood wondering what she would say. He remained with his back to the window, so that she was unable to see his face clearly. His cold greeting had chilled and wounded her; she felt ashamed and humiliated at having come, and pondered how best she could cut short the interview. During the brief drive from the studio she assured herself that she would be perfectly self-controlled and calm, the interview should be a formal one—she had heard he was going away; she was passing, etc.; they would meet and part conventionally; but she had not been prepared to find him so self-possessed, and consequently she was disarmed: a sharp pain went through her heart, and she found herself stammering.

"Mr. Ralfsteiner told me you wished to have the picture. I thought I would bring—it myself—I——"

"Thank you; it was very good of you! I did not mean Mr. Ralfsteiner to trouble you."

"It was no trouble; I was passing—but I will not detain you."

"You are not detaining me," he said coldly. He looked away from her. "You know Violet is married," he remarked after a moment.

"Yes," she answered.

"And you are going to be married the day after to-morrow?"

" Yes."

He laughed. "It's ridiculous, isn't it?"

"You muddled it so desperately!" she said.

"Yes, I suppose I did muddle it rather. Looks as if I'd fallen between two stools, doesn't it?"

She flushed scarlet and got up.

- "Oh! it was your fault. You insisted on the other stool," he continued.
 - "She was my friend."
 - "That's no excuse."
 - "She loved you."
 - "She's married to some one else."
 - "You were engaged to her before you knew me."
- "That wasn't my fault either. Our respective parents engaged us. It's the custom in my mother's country."
 - "Like your absurd duelling."
 - "Ah! that's a sensible custom."
- "It was horrible of you to fight—mad, silly, selfish, wild, un-English."
 - "You see I am not English."
- "English enough to have known better. It was vain of you!"
 - "Vain?"
 - "Yes, vain."
- "Vain!" he reiterated. "Yes, little girl, I was very vain about you—so vain about you. Wasn't it silly? Oh! I meant to kill him, only he saved me the trouble by placing a bullet just within an inch of my heart. I was slightly disabled, you see. In fact, I am only up just in time for the marriage festivity!" He laughed again. "Sort of irony about it all, isn't there?"

She looked at him for a long time in silence, then said suddenly, "Why did you never tell me you were

engaged, all those two years? You let her tell me?"

"I did not know you knew her?"

"Lots of people told me afterwards. Every one told me at that ball. I think I hated you. General de Courcelles asked me to marry him. I thought it would save you from some ignominy, at any rate; but you simply went raving mad instead, and challenged him for offering me the protection you had never offered—the protection you had no right to offer."

"I loved you; I could not help the other thing!"
"She loved you!"

"Oh! astonishingly—even to marrying some one else. You'll be saying you love me next!"

She held out her hand. "Good-bye; I hope you will like Australia. I hope—I hope you will be very—happy. Of course I do not—care now—I——"

He took no notice of the hand, but moved quickly away. She heard him say something to the effect that would she excuse him for a moment, and the door closed. Two hot tears coursed down her cheeks; she wiped them away, and looked round the room, trying to distract her thoughts from the painful recollection of his unkindness, and the awful anticipation of saying good-bye for ever. A packing case half full of books was by the table; the staring blue-and-red label, marked *Hold* in large letters, made her heart sick. She took out one of the little volumes; she would have liked to kiss it, but the sound of carriage wheels driving away startled her. The book fell from her hands. Walter Carroll came back and found her standing in the middle of the room, her

pretty curved lips parted, and a look of frightened questioning in the moist grey eyes. He smiled.

"What have you done?" she said.

"I have sent your carriage home."

"But I must return at once; I must go now!"

"No, I will not let you go; I am going to keep you."

She looked at him in dismay. "You do not know what you are saying."

"Yes, I am going to save you from making your life miserable. You have come; I will not let you go!"

She laid her hand on his arm. "Walter, you will let me go—I should not have come—it was wrong, but I could not help it. Do not punish me for loving you too dearly!"

"And you dare say it here," he said, gently taking her face between both his hands.

And she laughed, this Jean—it was very wrong, and inconsistent, and shocking, but all the same she laughed. He put his arms quickly round her, and kissed the sweet, beautiful mouth. She thought of nothing at that moment but of the passionate overwhelming joy that was with them. Love has no memory! How could she think then, when his warm breath was on her cheek, when his heart was beating against hers, and when youth and passion and strength were theirs. How could she think of an old man sitting alone in his study, his head resting in his hands, and a conscience that gnawed at his very life, seeming to keep time with the hurried beatings of a heart too feeble to have patience.

The ecstasy of the moment passed, and she re-

mained standing, her hand still resting in his, listening to his eager pleading with pained perplexity.

"But you must let me go now," she answered.

"Then I may come and see you to-morrow?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes."

"I can trust you?"

"Yes."

He took both her hands in his. "Jean, I cannot lose you again."

"No, no," she returned hurriedly, but he noticed the frightened look come back to her eyes.

"Ah! I dare not let you go; I should be mad."

"No, you must let me go now; we must hope it will be all right—if he will free me!"

" If?"

"And if he won't?" she said, looking at him.

He waited for her to continue, but she did not. They were interrupted by the entrance of the manservant with the lamp. She begged him to call her a cab. The man retired, and they were alone again only for a few moments; then he led her downstairs in the presence of the servant. "To-morrow at eleven," he said.

Jean was greeted with some surprise by Mrs. Wentford. "You sent the carriage home?" she questioned.

The girl hardly answered, and begged she might go to her room. There she walked restlessly about. She caught sight of the ring she had taken off two hours previously; she tossed a handkerchief over it. She met her eyes in the looking-glass; they were

brilliant—she hardly dare encounter them! Her cheeks were flushed, the sense of his kisses was still warm on them. She breathed the breath of ecstasy, and the blood leapt in her veins. He was safe! and she was his, his, his! All else had been a horrible nightmare! She would have the strength to throw it off. General de Courcelles would forgive her; he must forgive her; he would understand. Poor little Mrs. Wentford! But what was Mrs. Wentford to her? Walter was safe, safe, and was hers. The happiness was so great she could hardly bear it. Would the morrow never come?

It came, the morrow—a grey, cheerless morning. The rain beat against the window-panes, and a mist hung over the trees in the park. She glanced out; the few pedestrians pushed their way against the wind, their umbrellas saturated with wet. She laughed! Had any one been by her side she would have turned and said, "Isn't it a lovely wet day?"

She had breakfast in her room. Two hours later she came downstairs—she was going to beg mercy. The General was in the library, and she was going to tell him that she could not marry him, that he must let her off. She came quickly and quietly, with a spot of crimson on either cheek, and a hard, rapacious look in her eyes. Her lips were parted, and her teeth glistened: they were clenched. She knocked loudly; the knock echoed back to her. The house seemed very silent. She paused with her hand on the door. What was she going to do? Break the heart of an old man. Ask him to have pity on her because she was young, whilst she had

no pity for him who was old. He had been kind to her when she had no one in the world. She needed him no more now that her lover was free. Ah, it was a charming thing she was going to do! To be base for love's sake—ungrateful, cruel, selfish for love's sake. She shuddered. Consciousness of the truth flashed upon her between the knocking and the turning of the handle. She opened the door resolutely. Walter must go to Australia, and she must keep her promise. She crossed the room to his side.

He was seated at the writing-table, leaning his head on his hand, with his back to her. She stepped quickly up to him, and gently laid her hand on his shoulder. The tears glistened in her eyes.

He was reading a telegram—an old one, and crumpled. He was very intent. She slipped on her knees, and laid her head on his arm, and looked up into his face. He did not move.

"My dear friend," she said softly.

He did not answer. He was dead.

And she read written on the telegram dated from abroad:—

"Carroll out of danger."

The Green Cloak

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The Green Cloak

"WE have talked enough of serious things. You are hideously materialistic. I am going to the dress-maker—and I must go, so come along with me—it's only to take a pattern." She stood smiling at him as he hesitated on the doorstep.

"How absurd!" he said.

"Why? Mayn't I have pretty clothes? Must I be dowdy because I am rich?"

He turned with her as she closed the door, and they walked leisurely up the street.

"Dress is the least part of you; I never associate pretty clothes with you, or dress at all."

"That's very uncomplimentary, and it suggests a necklace and feathers."

They both laughed. She wasn't at all pretty, but he thought she looked charming when she laughed. He had known her ever since he could remember, yet he always found himself fascinated anew by her contagious mirthfulness.

"So long as sentiment is left us we can bear anything," she said, reverting to the conversation of the afternoon.

"On the contrary," he answered, "I thought it was the sentiment that sharpened the knife."

"Yes; but the blunt steel tears, and the wound won't heal."

"Oh, you are clever! Personally, I shut my doors on sentiment—I think her a dressed-up doll, and a liar to boot! She promises to give, and she only takes. We are poorer after her visits."

"Nevertheless, it's a splendid poverty—a dignified poverty! It is the poverty of Francis of Assisi," she exclaimed with enthusiasm.

"Granted; it's ascetic, and not æsthetic—it wears a hair shirt, and is ugly."

"But the birds of the air come down and listen to its voice."

He laughed. "It's not practical. You are not practical. You will find yourself left with your birds, and the warm touch of human interest will leave you. Theoretically, we all have sentiment, but, believe me, no one is sentimental. In the nineteenth century Art is the expression of sentiment, not life!"

"Please don't. Here we are."

" Am I to come in?"

"Yes. Madame Pourret is a wonderful person. She lives at the top of the house, looks like a cook, and makes for some of the smartest women in London. She's a secret of the select," she added, as they wound up a narrow staircase together and entered a spacious room, on the tables of which some completed garments and uncut materials were strewn. A green velvet cloak hung upon a stand near the window. They both stood still and looked at it.

"You are a base pessimist," she said.

"In the sense that I expect nothing and believe in no one, yes; consequently I lose nothing, and nothing

disappoints me. I am perfectly happy. Do not think I do not admire sentiment in you. I do enormously; it delights me, but from a selfish point of view. When I am sufficiently idiotic to be unselfish, I am terribly frightened at the prospect of what you must and will suffer. At moments I want to shake you, and shout in your ears not to be foolish, when I see you at the edge of one of your sentimental precipices. But, then, it completes the picture of you! And, being an artist, I hate to see a work of art ruined by plebeian criticism. To-day I am an idiot and plebeian; I want to shake you."

"Isn't that green cloak lovely?"

"Lovely!"

She turned round and looked him in the eyes. "Shake me, then," she said.

- "You must not believe so much in Merton."
- "Rather say you want to shake my belief in him."
- "No, not shake your belief in him, but in what is not in him."
- "Surely it is not so very sentimental to believe in one's future husband? Don't you want me to marry Horace Merton?"
 - "On the contrary!"
 - "Don't you think he cares for me?"
 - " I think he adores you."

She turned on her heel. "I think he has more sentiment than any man I know."

- "There you are wrong—he hasn't any. He only admires sentiment, as I do. He is absolutely void of it. He is commonplace. I am afraid you will come a cropper on a blunt knife."
 - "Nonsense! I won't listen to your evil prophecies.

Don't you think I would look nice in that cloak? I must have a cloak like that."

- "Green?"
- "Green means hope, sir. Do you hear? I shall have a going-away cloak just like that."
- "Hope is only the vain reflection of our own desires, and, like our desires, she leads us a very profitless dance."
- "Please don't be epigrammatic; an epigram always sounds right, and I can't bear being put right. I must try on this cloak. How do I look?"
 - " Adorable!"
- "That decides it. I shall have a facsimile. What fun! and it's so wrong to crib other people's ideas. Do you think the wearer will be furious?"
 - "She might if she saw how nice you looked."
- "That's charming of you! Won't Horace like it! Ah, Madame Pourret," she exclaimed, as the little fat woman came in, "I have only come to bring you this pattern. Is this cloak a French model, or are you making it for some one?"
 - "It is Mrs. Merton's, madame."
- "Isn't Mrs. Merton a little elderly and large for such a light colour?"

The foreigner looked as if she did not understand.

- "Doesn't it make her look red?"
- "No, madame—Madame Merton is so pale. It suits her fair hair too."
 - "What Mrs. Merton do you mean?"
 - " Mrs. Horace Merton."
- "Mr. Horace's mother?" the girl questioned lightly, as she surveyed herself in the long mirror.
 - " No, his wife."

"You are mistaken. Mr. Horace Merton is not married."

The woman smiled. "It must be another Mrs. Merton, madame, No. 161, Piccadilly."

The reflection of the girl's face in the glass became white to the lips, and for a moment there was a strange silence in the room; then she said hurriedly, "That's Mr. Merton's address; they are bachelor apartments. You see you are mistaken." The cloak slipped from her shoulders. Again the dressmaker smiled.

"I think, madame, Mrs. Merton told me she was not there very much. She said she and Mr. Merton were abroad a good deal. I am sending the cloak there just now. There is a country address too," she added, with the insistence of a foreigner determined to be right, and amused at a situation the significance of which she could not possibly realize.

"I am mistaken. I had not heard Mr. Merton was married. You will match the silk? Good morning."

The two hurried out of the room and down the stairs in silence. At the street door they stopped. A hansom cab was passing, and they hailed it.

- "You heard?" she said in a low voice.
- "Yes."
- "Did you know it?"
- "Good God, no! There may be some mistake."
- "There is no mistake."
- "My dear cousin, how can I help you?"
- "There is no help. You see you were right. He is commonplace. Ah, it's dreadful! I was going to be something less than she. Her cloak would have

covered less shame than mine—better be Mrs. Merton who is not Mrs. Merton than what I might have been."

"Do not judge him hastily."

"I am not judging—there is nothing to judge. He is only commonplace." She stepped into the cab, then turned a white face to him.

"Take care of yourself," he said.

The tears started to her eyes. "Good-bye, my kind Cynic; you have won to-day!" And the cab drove off. He remained standing a moment on the pavement.

"No," he murmured, "I have lost! Ah, how brave her sentiment makes her! Damn it! who would have dreamed the precipice was to be found in a dressmaker's apartment—third floor front?"

The Impediment

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The Impediment

THE pouring rain had ceased; white clouds hurried across the heavens as if busy about putting things all tidy again after the hurricane. Patches of blue sky were rapidly growing bigger and bigger, whilst shafts of dancing sunlight sped down to the horizon and caught the tips of the wavelets right across the sea. Now and then little showers of rain—they seemed to fall straight out of the azure—sprinkled the blades of grass with tiny drops of glistening water, and gusts of warm wind chased one round the corners or buffeted one in the face at unexpected moments. clung to the precipitous edge of the cliff she was climbing, her skirts tucked round her hips high enough to free her limbs from the danger of their hindrance, and to reveal the serge breeches, blue like her skirt, that gave her the look of a beautiful boy silhouetted against the green and white during her perilous progress. The chalk was slippery as ice from the wet, a contingency she had not anticipated when starting at the base of the great heights. down at the girl's feet a man was watching. some little hesitation, he hurried up an easier way, circumventing the crag, and arrived above her as she at last clambered over the point. She dropped her

skirts and walked on up the now gradually sloping downs with a swinging step, trying to ignore the man who made no pretence of ignoring her, but followed steadily at her side, a little in the rear. They went some distance in this manner. Jill looked ahead, as all well-bred young women do when they are followed ostensibly by a man. She looked at the sea and the sky, and the far rolling downs-great immutable waves repeating to the eye the movement of the ocean-and she thought, which was not quite well bred of her, "If he speaks I shall answer, and be jiggered!" I don't know what she meant by be jiggered, but that's what she thought. "Aunt Sylvia says that it is only shop girls who allow strange men to speak to them," she further reflected, but did not alter her determination.

When he did speak she answered more demurely than she had thought she would, and stood still, looking down at the water a hundred and fifty feet below them, with a little disinterested turn of the head, indicating a wish to be rid of his company. The man felt as if she had said, "Pray walk on and leave me in peace." He therefore remained and ventured another remark.

"You are down here like the rest of us, I suppose, for your holiday?"

Holiday! Why did he say holiday? Evidently he thought her a governess or a shop girl. Of course he thought her a shop girl—only shop girls answered when they were spoken to, according to Aunt Sylvia. She had answered; naturally he had drawn his own conclusion. For the honour of her sex she must be a shop girl. It was the only way of getting out of so

discreditable a position. Shop girls apparently had privileges!

"Oh, yes," she blurted out suddenly; "we have got ten days."

That is the way they would put it, she thought.

"Ten days is not very long?"

"Most firms give a week," she hazarded boldly.

"Firms!" he echoed.

"Shops!" she said.

" Oh !"

"I am a shop girl, you know . . . that's why ——" But she did not finish; she concluded he would know that. They walked on and talked. She found he became a little more familiar after the information.

"Come down here!" he said suddenly.

"No, thank you; I must be going back."

"Surely not yet! It's a beautiful walk. The path winds right down into the hamlet you see far at our feet."

She peeped over. It looked charming; she longed to go.

"It wouldn't be proper!" she exclaimed at last.

He laughed. There was something delightfully sincere in his laugh.

"Not proper! Do you think of such things in your holidays? Here, with all this gracious nature that gives you such hospitality—the ocean, and downs, and the heavens—are you not frightened to speak such a word? . . . Keep it for your shop, little girl, and come along with me, and I will show you the wonders that are hidden from propriety, as is all else that is pure, and beautiful, and natural, and good."

"Are you the schoolmaster?" she interrupted. He laughed again.

"No, though I like to pretend to teach sometimes!"

"I think it extremely nice being a shop girl!" she said, which remark of course he did not quite understand. She went with him down the little path.

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Rawless stood quite still after the strange girl he had encountered left him at the end of their walk, and watched her retreating figure; then he turned slowly round and strolled leisurely back towards the downs. A confusion of feelings was running riot in his person to a pitch of almost unendurable excitement, so that mastery had to be gained over them by a calm gait, and an attempt at deliberation. Physically he exulted; mentally he was depressed, disturbed, bewildered. The coursing quickly of his blood through his veins, and a sense of uncontrollable joy warned him he had gone apace towards falling in love with a beautiful creature who had arisen up out of the storm and taken him in the breezy wake of her skirts, a stroll that led to his own enslavement. On the other hand, his reason asserted that he had tumbled a victim to the whiles of a shop girl, whilst, like a deluded Quixote, he thought he had been chasing "The devil! A shop girl!" an unassailable maid. he pronounced aloud, and strode on at a quicker pace.

He succeeded in encountering her some days later, and assumed a more bantering tone. She shot him a look that, to use his own simile, made him feel a

small, crawling creature. An expression of astonishment, then amusement, had sped over her frank face. Evidently the shop girl was entertained at his manners. They nevertheless became friends. She was sweet, charming, wonderful, mysterious, She told him her name was Sarah Jones, and that her greatest ambition was to have a little shop that would be her very own. A toy shop she thought she should prefer. at some remote seaside place-Land's End, for instance; and he had found himself wondering if it wouldn't be quite delightful to have a shop with her. On his way back to his lodgings he called himself a confounded fool, a sentimental ape, a dunderheaded ass! He would certainly not meet the siren any more. and then set to thinking whereabouts he would be likely to tumble up against her on the morrow. Somehow, their respective notions of a likely place of meeting invariably coincided. Day after day they met, and talked, and climbed the hills, and sat out on the rocks by the sea. He did not realize that her ten days' holiday had long elapsed, and that she was nevertheless still there. She had proposed to introduce him to her aunt. He had hastily declined. The aunt would surely be vulgar-perhaps without the aspirates. She would ask him his intentions. No. he could not bear the little shop girl's relatives. He would go back to London at once.

He told her this one evening at sunset, quite abruptly. He noticed she turned a little pale. He continued.—

"I am going away because I love you!"

Then he stared stolidly out to sea and said not another word.

"What do you wish me to say?" she murmured, also looking out to sea.

"There is an impediment," he continued, ignoring her remark; "an infernal impediment!"

"A real impediment?" she asked, stooping a little forward.

"The only real thing that could harm us," he said; "an impediment of ideas built into a stronghold of unassailable prejudice."

"Tell me—it may not be there at all."

He hesitated a moment.

"It would insult you," he said, and he turned and strode away over the rocks. He had not even said good-bye.

She sat quite still, leaning her head upon her hand; a flush spread over her beautiful face, and a sad little smile tilted the corners of her mouth. What would she not have given if he might have leapt the walls of the stronghold, loved her, though she were a shop girl. Enough of that! Of course she must tell him, tell him the truth; but the thought made her little love story cold. She need not hurry. He would know at last, and come back to her. She walked home alone. Now and then as she went along she thought of the look in his eyes when he had told her he loved her, and her heart beat quicker for the recollection. She asked Aunt Sylvia if she knew anything of a family named Rawless. Her good relative answered with a sniff that some Rawlesses—the name was uncommon-had a place near her father's in Dorsetshire, and were about as proud as the old Norman type could be and survive. They dated back for ever, and ran to poets occasionally among the

cadets, of which the others would repeatedly be ashamed in each generation.

Surely Howard Rawless had shown something of the poet! On the morrow, and the next day, and the third she took her walk alone, and grew weary and sad, just as she must do, for the end of something had come, and the other beginning had not begun. She would meet him in town; meanwhile she must wait.

But he came again. She was sitting far out on the rocks, and suddenly he appeared by her side.

"You did not go to town then?"

"I went to town!"

"You have returned---"

He laughed. "Yes, the impediment has gone."

"Ah!" she said a little coldly; "you have found out?"

"Yes, I have found out that nothing matters but one thing. . . . You shall have the shop at Land's End if only you will let me take down the shutters for you." He spoke very gently. "Will you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?"

"I didn't like the idea of that shop; but when I was away in London I thought there are only two things I can bear to have in the world—a toy shop at Land's End . . . and you."

A strange look crept over the girl's face; for a moment she did not speak.

"Ah! you have done it after all," she said.

"What?" he asked.

They stood quite still, looking at one another.

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"Shown me that which is hidden from the world of propriety and prejudice." There was emotion in her voice as she spoke.

"I don't understand," he said simply.

Then she laughed as a tear crept through her lashes and sped down her cheek.

"Come along; you must be introduced to Aunt Sylvia. She rather dislikes shop girls, you know. You won't mind that, will you?"



What Counts



What Counts

THEY were really devoted, and the fact that he had not yet succeeded in procuring a post that should make it possible for them to marry, that they had not money enough in common speaking to set up house, drew them in a way closer together, and made the long engagement the sweeter for the uncertainty of things. Hope was a tender, mirthful companion with them: not blind, only bandaged across the eyes, and capable of lifting the bandage to give an assuring wink at these pretty lovers on occasions.

The day arrived, however, when the gods seemed to turn away from their concerns, and everything went suddenly askew. An evil spirit came upon the scenes—a wealthy evil spirit, old, and in love (it was preposterous!)—in love with Sylvia, and Sylvia fell under the power of his spell, for she met her lover one day with a pale little face, and said, "Temple, I must marry him. There are my sisters, you know, and the boys! The mother insists. We are so much poorer than I knew, and she says that you and I might wait for ever."

[&]quot;Sylvia," he answered; "this is simply nonsense! I refuse to take you seriously."

[&]quot;But, dear, we cannot marry, can we?"

"What could we do on five hundred a year?"

"Well," she answered, with a sudden merry look in her blue eyes, "we might love on that, you know."

"Precisely: love in a cottage, etc."

"Even in quite a nice little house!"

"You can't possibly propose---"

"Certainly not, I don't. That's exactly the question! We cannot love one another in a nice little house on five hundred a year, therefore I must marry some one else and live in a palace without love on a million!"

Temple Lewis opened his eyes in amazement.

"Ah!" he said, after a considerable pause, "you are all alike, you women. Money, money—you'd sell your souls for money!"

"I tried to sell it for love!" she said, again with a little laugh—a sad little laugh this time; but Temple did not know in the least what she meant. Women were always illogical when discussing any serious matter. He therefore strode with manly strides up and down the room, and frowned and bit his lip; then at last he came to a standstill, and said with really very noble calm.—

"You mean to marry this millionaire?"

The sight of his beautiful strong face, pale with suppressed indignation—just indignation—made the tears creep into her eyes. "What do you suggest then?" she said.

"Suggest!" he repeated with a genuine look of dismay. "What should I suggest?"

"I don't know," she answered, and the tears went back from whence they had come.

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Sylvia was engaged to the millionaire, and Temple Lewis was miserable. "He is sixty," he reiterated over and over again to himself, and set his teeth. "Who would have thought that Sylvia——"

Meanwhile, Sylvia looked wistfully at her lover when she met him, so that he who was old caught the look one day, and knew that the little girl he was to marry would sacrifice all his millions for that Jackanapes even now if—— What was that if? A month passed, and he watched. This evil spirit watched, peered into their souls; broke his own heart that he might see through the cleft into theirs. Sylvia loved the Jackanapes—the Jackanapes loved Sylvia, and money was the if—not with Sylvia even, only with the Jackanapes. One morning the millionaire came to Sylvia, and he said,—

"My little girl, I have been dreaming, as old men are wont to dream, a very pretty golden dream. Well, that's over. Whilst I was asleep dreaming, the little girl that I loved was suffering, suffering, and suffering, just that my dream might be golden. That sort of nonsense wouldn't do, would it? Now listen; Jackanapes has got a post."

" Jackanapes?"

"I beg your pardon—Mr. Temple Lewis; a very good post—a thousand a year to start with. And now you can marry and be happy."

"Marry and be happy? What do you mean?"

"Just that, little girl. That is how I love you. Good-bye! It was the prettiest dream in the world, my dream!" He stooped down and kissed both her hands, and she leant suddenly forward and looked

into his eyes. "You gave him that post," she said, but he only smiled sadly and went away.

Temple Lewis found her next day sitting in the great big drawing-room alone, her hands idle in her lap, and a wondrous look in her blue eyes. He felt suddenly shy, and could hardly stammer out his satisfaction with her, with himself, with the world in general.

"Oh! Sylvia!" he said, "you are not going to marry that man after all, and now, now I have such a splendid post."

"You will be wanting a wife, I suppose, in such a position?"

"Why, yes, Sylvia, I should think so. They expect one to be married, you know." He sat by her side and took her hand in his. There followed a little silence; then he continued, "Sylvia, now we will be married at once, won't we? You do really love me, don't you? You did all the time, didn't you? Now that you have sent him away. . . ."

"Temple!" she said, looking oddly up at him, "I did love you—but I don't now. I don't love you at all. . . . I love him. Loved you! Why, no, I never loved you. What am I saying?—we did not know what the word meant. Oh! it was a mean sort of substitute ours—but now I know what a poor thing this love is you, who are young, offer to us. Temple, I had read in books, in so many, so many books about love, and I always said to myself: There is no such thing. These are poets' fancies. No one in the world loves like that. And I heard people say: She loves him—he is in love with her; and I thought, I

suppose they love as Temple and I love, and I began to see what an honour you were conferring on me; for all the young men seemed to think, and every one else seemed to think, a poor girl was privileged whom young men condescended to notice."

"Sylvia, what are you saying?"

"Oh! you loved me in your way, no doubt; but not so much as you loved your clubs, your luxuries, your very smart clothes, your shooting. I was low down in the list of your pleasures. Something must be foresworn, and I was the one you found easiest to do without!" She looked up at him with no malice in her look, and laughed. Then added, "Some one else determined to do without me, too!"

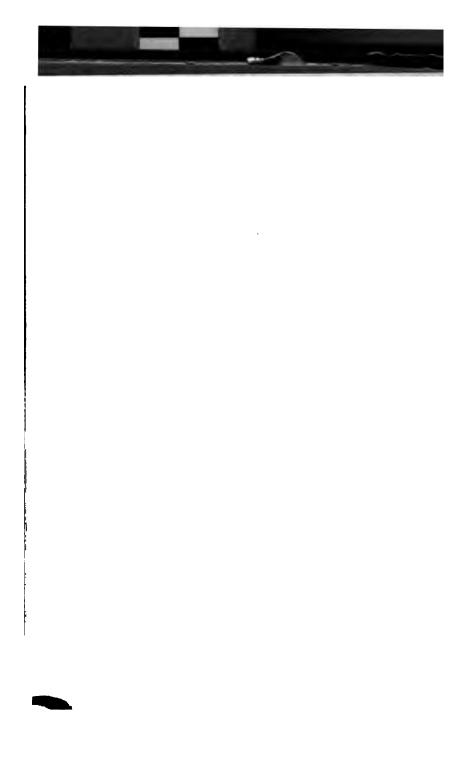
"Some one else? Do you mean that that scoundrel ——"

"Hush! his motive was different, you see—and I have asked him to come back. Temple, the books did not lie—the poets' fancies were not only fancies. Ah! when some of you are as old as he you may have learnt to be as great-hearted, and perhaps, if you try very hard, as delightful," she added demurely.

"I don't understand anything you say. I have come to ask you to be my wife. Will you, Sylvia?"

He stood before her, young, angry, masterful, and condescending.

- "No, I cannot: I have promised!"
- "To marry the millionaire?"
- "To marry King Cophetua, whom I love."
- " Love ?"
- "Yes, Temple; you mustn't tell any one, but I love him shamefully!"



Eric of Tolquhon



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Eric of Tolquhon

A LITTLE boy, a very little boy, sat in the recess of the great chimney corner with his wise eyes fixed on the flickering flame and his lips just perceptibly parted. He was thinking that he loved the flames. that they were very beautiful, and that they turned the vilest peats and crooked twigs and rotten woods into transcendental, lovely golden things that floated away with the blue smoke up to God's feet. after he had been watching their joyous movements, and staring in the very crimson heart of the fire, he stole from his place to the side of an old lady who wore white curls, and large round spectacles in which the flames were reflected in miniature tongues of light. She will certainly make a beautiful flame, thought the boy, when she is properly burnt, and he didn't consider this any unkind anticipation, on his part, of the ancient dame's future state.

"Grandmamma!" he exclaimed suddenly, "I want a red velvet suit and some black leather shoes!"

"Why, Eric," said the old lady, peering at him over the top of her book, "how delightful! You shall certainly have a red velvet suit and some black shoes!"

Eric of Tolquhon coloured with pleasure.

"May I have them soon?"

"As soon as we can get them made," and the old lady went on reading.

In due course of time the new suit arrived, and Eric on the morrow arrayed himself in it with the greatest excitement and delight. For such a little boy he felt as tall as a tree, and as light as one of his beloved flames. He tossed his head and strode (they were quite tiny strides) downstairs into the presence of his lady grandmamma.

"How beautiful, Eric!" said she, at which his heart set to beating, and he smiled a wondrous little smile of unspeakable delight. But during the course of breakfast the old lady remarked suddenly, "There's something wrong about that suit, Eric, and I can't think what it is!"

"Wrong," repeated the boy in dismay.

"Yes, something—it fits you perfectly—it seems moulded to your body—but——"

"You are mistaken!" said the little fellow gravely, "there can be nothing wrong!" And neither of them alluded again to the matter until the end of the meal, when Eric rose to prepare himself for school.

"I know what it is," she said; "you ought to have had a black velvet suit and red leather shoes—that is it. I could not make out what it was."

Eric's hands began to tremble. He could not tell his grandmamma that she was hopelessly wrong—that would be impolite; but somehow when he kissed her good-bye he felt that she wasn't quite so wonderful as she had always seemed to him. A blatant black velvet suit hovered between them, and he

sighed, and went on his way to school with a new sense of the crookedness of life.

He was greeted at the school-house with shouts of appreciation from the crowd of little children who were waiting for the door to be opened by the young schoolmaster, like a lot of clustering flowers in a summer garden.

"How lovely! how lovely!" said they, and danced round him with joy at the sight of such a suit of flaming red, and Eric of Tolquhon was very elated, and very simply happy too; when suddenly a girlish imp, who was not all like a flower, unless perhaps an artificial one cut out of a turnip, exclaimed, "How ridiculous! you ought to have had a black velvet suit and red shoes."

A great hush fell upon the little crowd. The boy turned quite white. "I do not agree with you," he said; but, alas! the others did. One by one they stared at him, their fat little heads turned first to one side and then to another, deciding at last with most positive conviction that a black velvet suit it of course ought to have been, with red shoes. Eric was indignant, but his indignation availed little; they turned up their pink noses, and ignored his assertions that they had admired it enough at first.

In class he could not do his lessons. Two and two would make five, and he found himself liking the notion.

"Eric," said the young schoolmaster, "why on earth don't you get a black——"

The boy looked up, crimson with shame, hesitated a moment, then fled—he rushed out of the door, up the road, across the wooden bridge to the woods beyond.

That the schoolmaster, the learned schoolmaster, should say such a preposterous thing—that was awful! He stayed in the woods. He stayed all day and all night and all the next day. The birds did not remind him that he should have had a black velvet suit, and the running stream reflected back his scarlet radiance with no shadowy after-reflection. The squirrels and the sweet wild things of earth welcomed the coloured child among them, and brought him nuts to eat, and taught him how to live in the hollow of a tree.

On the second day Eric fell asleep in the long grass, and was awakened by the sound of a human voice in his ear. He started up, and with still sleepy eyes he beheld a little girl like a fairy, with flaxen curls and a yellow sash, and she smiled at him, and put her little hand on his sleeve and said, "How soft and pretty! What a beautiful suit!" And Eric laughed and then grew serious, thinking she would surely find out quite soon that it ought to have been black. She did not, however, so that they became at once friends, and wandered away hand in hand to explore the beautiful woods. And she came again and again, and Eric found at last that he loved her even more than he loved his flames. One day she said to him, "You are different to any one in the world—I suppose that is why I like you; but you are very, very different!" and she sighed. And another time she said, "There is something about you that is strange—I wonder what it is."

"Something wrong, is it?" he asked.

[&]quot;No," she answered, "oh, no; how could there be anything wrong—only something strange!"

"Next Tuesday is my birthday," said he irrelevantly.

"Oh, I must give you something. What shall I give you? I must think. It shall be a surprise. Something lovely."

"Lovely," repeated he, with glowing eyes; and then he said, "I should like you!" and she answered, "I will send myself in a parcel," and they tightened their little hands in one another's and laughed gleefully.

* * * * *

On the morning of his birthday Eric rose with the rising of the sun. What would be his present? What would she think of? Perhaps a bird that would sing to him, or a printed book of fairy stories, or—well, he would not try to guess, only wait for the beautiful surprise. He bathed in the stream, and put on his clothes with great care. He was to be king of that day, and his queen was to send him a present. When he returned to his hollow in the tree he spied a parcel, and in feverish haste he untied the string. It was something exquisitely soft. When it was unfolded, however, he sat quite still, wide-eyed and horror-stricken. It was a black velvet suit of clothes and a pair of red shoes.

He sprang to his feet and tore off his flame garments and dragged on the detested suit; then he put his own into the hollow of the tree and went home.

"Ah!" said the old lady as he came quietly in, "you look quite respectable! Only you shouldn't stay so long in the woods, or the wood gnomes will

turn you into one of themselves!" and she smiled; but the boy answered nothing at all.

He went to school next day, and no one paid much attention to him. Some murmured indifferently, "Ah! that's right, of course," and then forgot about the matter.

Two and two made four quite easily now, and he wondered how he had ever thought it made five, while right down in his secret heart something whispered, "It does really, only people who wear black velvet suits——" He stifled the voice.

Day by day he grew more silent, less beautiful and winning, less a wondrous child-mystery that had made the world sweeter for its presence. He never watched the flames now, and at school they told him about other flames that were cruel and ugly, that tortured and did not purify, and lasted for ever and ever, and God could not extinguish them.

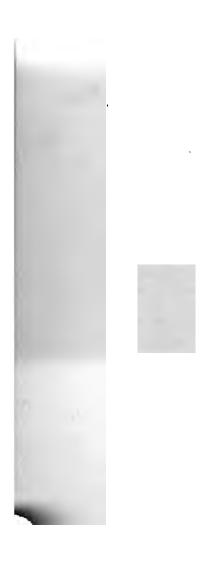
This, he wanted to say was not true, but somehow his black velvet suit seemed to declare that such a remark would be eminently improper. So it happened that as the days went their way Eric of Tolquhon began perceptibly to fade, to droop as a wilted flower; for life had become terrible to him, and with weariness of the spirit came exhaustion of the body. At last he could bear the stifling mood no longer. He stole from the house back to the woods. He had not seen his little comrade again, he had never wanted to; now he wondered if he should see her; but as he went his steps failed him, his breath came short, and the road thither seemed for ever stretching before him. Perhaps he would die whilst he was yet on the way. Perhaps he would never, never reach

the hollow in the tree! A look of infinite pain crossed his tired little face as he dragged desperately on, praying childishly for strength to reach as far as the sweet woods.

* * * *

He was there at last, faint and trembling. He tore off the hated garments, flung them aside, and spread out the red velvet suit on the grass. A sudden breeze rustled through the trees. He looked down wistfully at the clothes, the sunshine seemed to sing in his ears and the sight of things to grow dim before his eyes. He stretched out his hands and vainly beat the air with them, then fell in a little naked heap on the ground and lay quite still.

And she, she came along, and saw first the remnants of her present on the ground, and thought—"Oh! how ungrateful of him!" and then a little further on in the long grass where she had first seen him asleep, she found him, a beautiful white child lying on a crimson carpet, a yellow butterfly nestling in his hair and two squirrels keeping sentinel at his feet, and it came to the little girl that her playmate was dead—Eric of Tolquhon was dead, and she never knew that she had killed . . . Eric of Tolquhon.





Jotchie



Jotchie

SHE sat in the middle of the room, a world of fun and life and capacity expressed in her young physiognomy as she drank in the details of the studio, the little studio right at the top of the formidable lawyers' buildings in Knight Square, beneath the very shadow of the courts themselves. Men were all about her, and she was going to work like a man, live like a man, think as a man, and still be a pretty woman. She caught a glimpse of her face in the glass over the chimney—such a white face, and a red mouth, square at the corners—the locks of black waving hair. the pallor of her skin, and the strange, shining, seacoloured eyes struck her as an odd, funny whole, that some persons might admire, since she rather admired it herself. She looked down at the new canvases on the floor affectionately. This year her work must be very, very good! Were they thinking of her at home far away in the north, she wondered? Well, she wasn't going to think of them at all for a long time. only of Art—Art with a capital "A." What a tussle she had had to obtain permission from her mother to come away to London and go to an Art-School! She had been to an Art-School for nine months the year previous. Now she had a studio—her own

studio! How shocked the mother and father had been at first! And then, when they had found that so many girls did likewise, they had grown interested, and talked of her exhibiting at the Royal Academy, and perhaps becoming a Royal Academician. How sweet they were, and ambitious for her, and silly and foolish and lovable! She didn't think it likely that she'd ever be an Academician, but she would be great. The dear old people would forgive her when she became great. They'd certainly be disappointed if she didn't become great quite soon—that was the worst! They were really a little impatient about it.

The shadows deepened as she sat musing. The door was wide open, and she could hear the office doors closing downstairs as the barristers-real live barristers—were departing for the West End. She knew nothing of the West End. It didn't attract her very much. In the future the West End would acknowledge her. She fixed her eyes on a white card pinned on to the door with brass nails: "Helen Forrester" was printed in large letters on it. Helen Forrester was the original owner of the studio. She had married. What a pretty name Forrester was! She wished her name was Forrester. Her own was rather a common one. Why shouldn't she take a nom de guerre? Great men and women took noms de guerre, and her people wouldn't hear of her progress till the name had become famous; then she would tell them that she, she was the great Miss Forrester. A heavy footstep on the stairs attracted her attention, and a moment afterwards, in the twilight outside, the figure of a man threw a shadow across the threshold as he peered at the card on

the door. She sat a moment watching him, amused. He was very plain and bald.

"Is it Miss Forrester?" he said. She rose and came to the door. He held a paper in his hand, and explained that it had been left at his rooms. He was a new-comer; in fact, he had only entered his rooms the day before and found this letter. He had told the porter, but evidently the good man had forgotten. He stammered as he spoke and blushed queerly.

"Thank you," she said; "that's quite right." They stood for a moment in silence; then he turned slowly round and went down the iron staircase again. She noticed he rather shuffled. Well, she was Helen Forrester to him, at any rate, and she shut the door with a laugh.

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Steadily for three months Helen Forrester worked hard. She walked down from the house in Russell Street where she lodged with a quaint old lady, who thought her boarder dangerously lovely, and was in a constant good-natured flutter of anxiety lest some bold villain should come and carry off her charge under her very eyes. The good lady highly approved of the assumed name. It suggested to her mystery and importance, certainly proper atmospheres to surround youth and beauty struggling in the name of Art. She had learnt all she knew of art from this little country girl, but she did not acknowledge this even to herself. She must always have known about that capital "A," and she dilated upon the subject to her neighbour, Mistress Green, with verbose sincerity.

Mistress Green was edified, and passed the great "A" on.

The daily walk was long enough to bring the colour fresh to the girl's cheeks and fill her with a sense of life and importance and hurry as she crossed the busy thoroughfares. The blood would course quicker through her young veins in these days of spring—these days of her early apprenticeship.

She tumbled up against Mr. Brown often enough on the stairs: he always stammered and blushed, and then shuffled away silently; and she always laughed a good morning and retreated hurriedly into her sanctum. By degrees, however, they grew more friendly, and he expressed a wish to see some of her work. One morning she received a neat little note from him, asking her to tea in his rooms. He explained he had invited his sister, Lady Jefferson, to meet her, and one or two others. He hoped she wouldn't think it too unconventional. The letter was addressed Miss Helen Forrester, and had his initials outside. A queer, uncomfortable sense filled the light-hearted student as she hesitatingly opened the envelope. After all, the other Miss Helen Forrester no longer existed! She had a right to any nom de guerre she chose to select. However, she was not quite sure she would go to the tea. In her answer she begged to be allowed to leave it open. Mr. Brown seemed hurt when they met again. "If you would choose your own day," he stammered; so she laughingly answered that she'd come anyhow.

On the afternoon, as she went downstairs, she felt oddly shy, and hesitated at his door some time before she had courage to knock, and then she found herself

thinking what a pity it was that Mr. Brown was so ugly. The arrival of evident guests up the noisy stairs intimidated her even more: she retreated back, in hope that they might enter first. The *they* proved to be a very good-looking young man, who, on seeing her remained standing with a certain diffidence peculiarly attractive to the girl who knew nothing of London men's manners. "One of us must knock," she said, regaining her self-possession. "Perhaps we'd better," he laughed. Then Mr. Brown appeared, and ushered the two in.

Lady Jefferson was young and pretty, and smiled at Helen—Helen thought—so kindly, and every one made much of her. Life seemed at that moment very pleasant and very full. She didn't know quite how it happened, but she found herself sitting on an oak settee in the corner, talking intimately with the stranger she had met outside, and the others seemed to have quite forgotten their existence. Mr. Brown was blushing and stammering to a young lady who was pouring down volleys of chaff on his modest head.

"Mr. Brown thinks a great deal of your work," he said. "I should like so much to see some. Mightn't we steal to your studio before we go?" He spoke quietly, and looked right into her eyes.

She caught the scent of the tuberose in his buttonhole, and noticed suddenly his immaculate clothes. She flushed with pleasure. "I should like to show you my work. You seem to know so much about Art."

"Indeed, no," he said deprecatingly; "only a little about the early Italian schools. Aren't you fond of

those delightful old painters who loved expression better than form, and colour more than perspective?"

"I do not know much about them," she answered shyly: "I have never been to Italy."

"Italy!" he echoed, and there was a ring in his voice which made her catch her breath and look at him with her strange green eyes wide open. For a moment they looked at one another in silence. She would have liked to kiss his hands, he seemed so wonderful to her. "I did not know men ever cared for such things unless they were painters," she said hurriedly; then Mr. Brown joined them. She thought he stammered and blushed more than usual, and she found herself comparing his ill-fitting clothes and his rugged, plain features to the beautiful, refined face and immaculate garments of his friend; but he was very kind to her, and she greeted him with a lovely, grateful little smile, which he bore with an eloquent dumbness peculiarly his own.

"He is so expressive when he says nothing," her companion remarked later as they wound up the iron staircase to her studio, and she laughed happily. In the country people didn't talk like that, but then people there knew nothing about Art either, or anything that was wonderful. Even the country, Londoners seemed to know more about, and to love more intimately than those who lived in its midst. After all, dirty, foggy, matter-of-fact London was only the outward shell. The gods dwelt within, and, to her romantic little soul, a special deity in the form of the tall, good-looking youth by her side.

He admired her work with the same deferential politeness with which he had submitted his opinion

of the Early Masters, and found qualities she had never dreamed of, and that gave her a sudden thrill of excitement and understanding. Her next work would be miles ahead.

"This is exquisite," he said suddenly, unearthing a board from the corner. It was a water-colour sketch of Jacob wrestling with the Angel. A talented, imaginative sketch, with a touch of genius in the composition, though ill-drawn and crude enough. "How charming of you to choose such a subject!"

"The subject appeals to me so," she said; "it's very badly done, but some day I hope to do it as I feel it. I want to express the great idea that all evil, if we wrestle with it long enough, may prove to be the blessing angel!" Her face became solemn and radiant as she spoke. The dilettante youth of London's rearing turned and looked at her with a questioning curiosity in his glance. The little country girl was religious then, as well as beautiful and talented! Some time later he said good-bye, shaking hands with a conventional coldness she thought strange after their seeming intimate afternoon. When he was gone, the scent of the tuberose still hung upon She sat down, and, clasping her strong white hands together, she stared at Jacob and the Angel till she saw the good patriarch no longer, and the Angel seemed to be speaking to her in the winning, low accents of her new visitor.

She worked the better for the next few days, singing over her painting as only young students, full of hope, and love for their work, can; but on the fifth day she felt a longing to see Mr. Brown's friend

JOTCHIE ·

again—to ask him so many things about pictures he had seen—about Italy, and the new French Symbolists to whom he had alluded—to feel his kind grey eyes on her, and even to scent the fragrance of his flowers.

Mr. Brown paid her a visit, but made no allusion to him, and she said nothing of his having been upstairs. She had no reason for not mentioning this, she simply didn't. She assured herself afterwards that Mr. Brown would not be interested. Mr. Brown had brought her some flowers to paint: he was so kind. Next day she tried to paint the flowers, but she couldn't. She tossed her brushes aside, and putting on a sailor-hat and coat, went out. As the fresh air met her warm cheeks she regained her spirits. When men couldn't work they went out for a walk. Well! she would go for a walk.

She found her way down to the Temple. Crossing the Strand was delightful; but the quiet of the strange old inns, their beauty and charm, caught her imagination. She wandered about like the little girl in the fairy tale, with not very much purpose, and some notion of coming at last on an enchanted palace.

— Court was very like an enchanted palace to her, with its fountain splashing, the wide stone steps, the bridge-like terrace stretching to the Gothic buildings behind, the sweep of emerald grass, and the strange quiet in the heart of the great City. She stood still and looked down in the basin of water and laughed softly; when she turned round she saw Mr. Brown's friend a little way off. He greeted her with the same deferential manner that had won her on their first meeting.

"I knew it could only be you, Miss Forrester; no Londoner could be standing alone at five o'clock in the afternoon, gazing at these Arcadian efforts in the midst of our tumultuous city."

She shook hands. It seemed quite natural to her to meet him, and she let him show her some of the other courts and squares she did not know. They strolled about the whole afternoon, and, later on, as the light of the sunset lit the windows of the old houses with a crimson glimmer—the many-paned windows, tier upon tier in the shadowy courts—and the sparrows 'clustered noisily together in the trees, while something of a still evening breeze swept up from the river, he alluded to friendship, and her blood seemed to turn over in her veins with happiness at the thought of an intimate friendship with this clever, brilliant man.

Several months passed, and not very much work was done in the little sky-high studio, but a half-finished portrait of a man on the easel told something of an increased intimacy between the young people. The *spiritual* world of art had been lived in; the abstract had been discussed, and the girl's comprehension of the capital "A" had seemed to take wing; there was time enough for the concrete execution.

"I must begin and work harder, though," she said to him one day as she bent her head quite near his to look for some special brush in a paint-box. Her cheek looked very soft and round as she bent down. With an unpremeditated movement he put out his hand and stroked her face. She flushed crimson and went back to her work, and the rest of the sitting

passed awkwardly for both. She turned very pale as he said good-bye with a cheerful indifference that stung her as a cut from a whip.

At the next sitting, however, she was herself again, only with an added lustre in her eyes as she looked into his. He had come in the afternoon, a little late for work, so that the sitting could not last very long. They had tea together, and felt the spell of inconsequence as the light gradually waned and the fire threw a warm glow across the room. Young Joy was beating on the waves of the air, and they caught it between their parted lips as they laughed to one another. A wistful look crept into the girl's face while she listened to the sound of his low voice. She crouched down on the fender at his feet, and grew more and more silent as he talked of poetry, and literature, and the modern movement in Art: then she rose and looked down upon him with moist shining eves: between the red of her full lips the edges of her teeth gleamed: she parted them to give a quick, sudden sigh of joy; he caught her in his arms, and the shadows deepened round them. It was morning before he left. As he opened the door silently he looked back at the little sleeping figure on the narrow couch, whose mouth was still curved in a smile, and whose pure little heart could have understood nothing of the wrong he had done her. A wave of cold shame swept over him as he stole out and closed the door.

Mr. Brown sat in his chambers and waited, watching the hands of the clock until they should reach a

certain place, when he meant to go upstairs and carry his flowers to Helen Forrester, and ask her to be his wife. He had on his best clothes—his best clothes looked one degree less well-fitting than the old ones, which at least had fallen to the shape of his ungainly figure. He was fastidious as to the time: he would not like to disturb her in her work; he would wait another moment. A knock interrupted his counting, and he turned, a little vexed, to the intruder. Business hours were over, and he had no desire for a visitor just then. Oliver came in and threw himself down in a chair with very little ceremony.

"What's up, Oliver?" he said cheerfully, rejoicing that the intruder was one he could get rid of without much ceremony.

"I am in the devil of a mess, Brown," the youth answered, and Mr. Brown looked dark. If the lad was going to sit there and confide a long story, he would never get up to the little studio.

"My dear boy," he said, rather unsympathetically, "you know you ought to get something to do. How about that appointment you told me you were looking after? Why don't you take it and get away from this indolent, enervating life you lead here? What is it?" he continued, noting a miserable, hopeless expression deepening on his visitor's face. "The usual thing?"

"You needn't be satirical, old chap. God knows I am wretched enough. . . . I can't marry her

[&]quot;You can't?"

[&]quot;You know I haven't a penny in the world."

[&]quot;I mean that she's not the sort of person?"

The young man looked up, and he deliberately lied,:
"No, she's not."

Brown became quite serious. He put his hand on the other's shoulder and spoke hurriedly.

"Oliver, you know how I disapprove of all your aesthetic notions of life—your wild ideas of free love, and a thousand other things you talk more of than you know about; yet I can imagine nothing so terrible as a young man marrying a woman who is not, not—well, not a lady. You are so young, with an unhappy trick of seeming a man many years older, it brings you into temptations you are too young to resist; but for God's sake don't ruin your whole life by an impossible union with——. Think, it would break your mother's heart."

"What about hers?" he answered in a low voice.

"She'd be as miserable as you—especially if there is no money."

"Ah! it's the money," said the boy, hardly listening to the rest. "I am a coward; I can't fight the world!"

"Fight the world! that's what you must do. Go away and work. Get healthy ideas into your head, and throw up this Hedonism which is sapping the vitality of you all."

When he was gone, Brown felt a sense of relief. He was fond of the boy, believing there was something really noble in him yet; but the pure vision of Helen Forrester filled his mind, so that, with a sigh, he was able to forget his friend's troubles. He took up the flowers hurriedly, and made his way upstairs. At her door he hesitated with an oppressive sense of fear; then he knocked. His heart beat high, and loud sounds as of water rushing past dinned in his ears so

that he did not hear any voice from within. He knocked again louder, then opened the door, thinking he heard her.

She was standing in the middle of the room. Her face was as white as marble. Under the strange luminous eyes, which now had a look of a frightened animal, were deep blue shadows. Her lips, usually curved in a welcome smile, only seemed as a red stain on the pale physiognomy.

- "I beg your pardon," she stammered; "I thought it was Mr. Oliver."
 - "Oliver!"
- "Yes, I have been expecting him," and he noticed that she clasped her hands till the veins rose up.
- "I have brought you some flowers," he murmured. His face had turned ashen grey. "Mr. Oliver has just left me."
 - "He has been here?" she echoed.
 - "Yes."

Then she sank slowly into the chair and stared at him as if he were not there, and her hands dropped to her sides. "I have been expecting him for three days—for the portrait, you know"—her voice sounded hollow and almost inaudible.

" I understand."

She looked at the door, and he followed her gaze; then, understanding, he turned slowly round like a blind man, and shuffled out and down the stairs, still holding the flowers.

When Oliver left Brown's rooms the latter had come out with him to the stairs and seen him down. The young man had hesitated with the intention of going up, but his friend gave him no chance.

At his own chambers he found a telegram from the Foreign Office. His hand trembled as he read it, and the blood mounted to his forehead with a sudden glow of healthy ambition; then the pallor of shame and disquietude returned, and he went out to wander aimlessly about the streets.

Next morning he waited at the Foreign Office.

"It isn't a very remunerative appointment," explained Sir Charles; "and, in fact, you'll have some difficulty if you mean to rely entirely upon the pay—though I did it in my time," he added with a smile. "But it will lead to other things. You are young. If you can remain on the full five years, there's every reason to hope that you will be entrusted with the graver responsibilities of——" They conversed further for some minutes, and the elder man ended: "We'll want you to start to-morrow, you know. It is of great importance you should be there before the third."

Three weeks later Helen Forrester tore the card from the door which bore her name, and gave up the key of the little studio to the porter.

Day after day she had waited for the sound of his footstep on the iron staircase; then at last she had knelt down near the easel on which stood the picture of Jacob wrestling with the Angel, and remembering all it had meant to her she pressed her head against the edge of the easel and cried, as little children cry, with big heavy sobs.

When she said good-bye to the old lady who had been so kind to her, she put her arms round her neck and said, with a little laugh, and the tears gleaming in her eyes: "You know, I think we must

spell Art, after all, with a small 'a.' We are apt to write it too large in capitals, with a flourish that has no meaning." And the little old lady did not understand her at all, but said good-bye with the tears in her old eyes, too. And, in remembrance of the fresh young life that had passed nine months under her roof, she decorated the drawing-room with all the "art fabrics" and æsthetic potteries her slender purse could afford to purchase, till the quaint old parlour looked like a veritable fancy bazaar, and she the shrivelled vendor of its goods.

Seven years passed, and George Oliver returned to England to take possession of the estates, and assume the name and title of his cousin, Sir Arthur Seymour, who had lost his young life in the fatal African Expedition. The man had the same keen, sensitive face of the youth who had left England, yet with a nobler, less affected expression, and bronzed from constant exposure to the Southern suns. He was fêted and made much of by all the world, men and women: by the mothers who wished to marry their daughters well, and by the men who wanted his influence, or an invita-The matrimonial mothers did not ation to his shoot. seem more contemptible than these latter, only a little more pathetic. They were surely a natural result of the unnatural conventionalities of society; but the men, who sought amusement in accepting their hospitality to betray and laugh at their evident schemes, he found himself regarding with no little contempt. He lived quietly in the country after the first year or two, dividing his time between amateur farming

and his books-the old love of literature still lingered in his habits.

On his first return to England he had sought for Helen Forrester with the odd sensation of treading back into the paths of a past that was strangely dead to him, and of which she had been the only pure and beautiful influence. He did not expect to find her, and was hardly disappointed at the failure; and when some time later he asked Miss Western to share his home, the personality of Helen Forrester remained to him a sacred memory he found no wrong in thinking loyally of. He was very much in love with Hilda Western. He had met her living in the country, unspoilt by London influence or by the usual country-house atmosphere of unsound morals and conventional prejudices. She was simple, unsophisticated, and beautiful, and her parents were kind, unworldly gentlefolk, who hardly ever left their county, and were beloved by the peasants about them.

"I am not worthy of you," he said to her one day, and she echoed his phrase shyly, and added: "You must be mocking me. Look, I have another letter from Jotchie; she spoils me as much as you do!"

"Ah, your great sister!" he said with a laugh.
"Who would think you were the sister of a celebrated poetess! When am I to meet her?"

"I don't know—soon, I hope. She has been abroad a whole year. It's the first time she has left us for so long."

They read the letter together—a bright, beautiful letter, full of fun, yet with a note of sadness here and there which left them both with the mystery of her

presence upon them. "She is very dear to me." Hilda finished folding up the foreign paper. "There is no one in the world quite like her!"

"You have seen such a lot of the world, little girl," he said in banter.

"I have seen nothing of it, and yet I can't tell you what it is about her that makes us know she is rare. The very poor people in the village find her so, and the world which I know so little about has found the same quality in her work."

"She has a champion!"

"She has been so good to me. A mother and sister and brother all in one!" She ended with a laugh. "People used to call her my guardian-angel... I remember her saying to me one day when we were sitting together in a green place in the woods: "Hilda, you shall never suffer. I am a fairy, and I will weave a magic circle round you so that evil shall not come near you."

"How charming! Is she beautiful, like you?"

"She is a little like me; not very, only she is——"

" Is what?"

" Is beautiful."

"Do you know," he said, "I have only seen one woman in my life whom I think as beautiful as you—one I knew long, long ago."

The girl blushed, and for a moment did not speak; then she said, with a little frightened look in her eyes, "Did you love her?" and she noted a sudden expression of pain cross his face.

"Love her!" he echoed, as if to himself; "good God! no!"

The young poet-sister wrote a letter of congratulation to him, spirited and charming as the other he had seen, full of concern for her sister's happiness, and a little gentle raillery regarding the unworthiness of his sex generally. He sent her a book in return, a new publication that had struck him as very beautiful. An appreciative criticism followed: he wrote again, other books passed between them, and letters full of challenging thoughts. Hers were often addressed to himself and Hilda. Hilda and he read them together, shoulder to shoulder, laughing, and enjoying her bright style, and kissing between a sentence Hilda might fail to understand.

"You are both dreadfully literary," Hilda said one day, a little dolefully, and he laughed at her. "Oh! we'll turn you into quite a savante soon!"

"Would you have liked me to understand those

sort of things?" she said.

"Of course not. A bluestocking little wife? No!" He looked away for a moment, and his words did not seem to be quite the outcome of his thoughts.

Jotchie had a tiny little house in Kensington where Hilda used to go and stay with her from time to time, and now, on her return from abroad, the meeting with George Seymour was arranged to take place there.

He felt a certain sense of pleasurable curiosity at the thought of at last meeting the woman with whom he had had such a delightful correspondence. This celebrity the world had failed to bespatter with mud, whose work was vigorous and pure, lacking all the dank, self-centred, self-tortured, analytical efforts of

her complaining compeers, this girl poet, who was above all things the kind guardian sister of his little wife to be! He swung along through the thawing snow which had lain several inches thick on the unbeaten ways for nearly a week, and was now melting into slush with a fresh downpour of sleet and snow. On entering the little hall, and thence through to the drawing-room, he was struck with the tasteful arrangement of things—the books on the walls, curios unaffectedly placed, and photographs of the early masters' work he loved so well. He found himself wishing that Hilda had a little of this taste. He had seen her room in the north, and remembered keenly the decorative efforts of Liberty silk, plush photograph-frames, little china animals and Japanese fans; and he laughed at the recollection. Then a rustle on the stairs, and the sudden entry of some one made him turn round.

Not Miss Josephine Western but Helen Forrester stood before him, glorified into the most lovely woman he had ever seen, and he pressed his hands to his eyes with a bewildered sense of pain. was she here?" She stood laughing at him. Surely she could not see him? No, he had his back to the light! She wore a purple gown; it seemed to be shot with green and to fall in iridescent waves to her feet. He noticed every detail. Her sleeves were of purple, and ended at the elbow, from which hung long cream lace to her finger-tips. She lifted her hand and he saw the round white arm beneath. And her eves. Ah! he knew the eyes—they had not changed—green like the sea, with the look of infinite kindness in their luminous depths. And the

white, white forehead, broad and smooth, shadowed

by the wilful curls he had loved long ago.

"How do you do? I can't see you. I will move the lamp. Hilda, you know, has been out in all this wet, and I made her change; so she sent me down to make friends with you first. She says she'll be a long time. I don't think she will really."

A strange silence followed, and he stood as one bound, unable to move. "Helen!" he said at last, and the sound of his voice was tortured and terrible,

and echoed through the room.

She leapt to the lamp and raised it over her head, then put it hurriedly down. Before he caught the sound of her voice again it seemed as if all the years of his life were passing by him, and eternity mocking at him.

"Why did you not tell me?" she said. And she spoke gently, so that he shrank from very shame.

"Good God! how could I know?"

They stood and looked at one another, alive each one, with the terror of despair and the quickening of passion in their veins. "But still I have found you," he said hoarsely. "Nothing else matters. Ah, Helen! I have dreamed of this a thousand times. It has happened at last."

"Hush, dear!" she said softly; "I had dreamed of it, too, but not like this."

"Did you ever forgive me?"

"I did not think of you in that way. It seemed to me so dreadful you did not love me more—because —because I loved you very much——"

"Helen, I worshipped you—I worshipped you—I have always worshipped you. I was a coward, and

Fate took my part. I meant to write to you over there, but on arriving I took the fever; six weeks later I wrote, and you never answered me, and I knew then you would not forgive me."

"I did not receive the letter; I left the studio, you know, and dropped the name."

She stole up to him and their fingers met and she sighed softly—the echo of that sigh that had so tempted him long ago in his boyhood, and his breath came quickly. "Sweetheart!" he said, and she shrank suddenly away.

"You have forgotten Hilda. She will be here in a few moments. What can I do? Ah! what can we do? Listen—you must go away from us both—she must never know—we'll find an excuse. I can never, never see you again. Now go quickly—quickly—before I go mad!"

She pressed her hand to her eyes, and a wanton silence lay upon the air; then came that irrelevant question which one so often puts at moments of misery—perhaps to give one time to bear immediate pain—

"Why did you give up painting?"

"You!" she answered. "I could not paint ever again—but we are wasting time. You must go—quickly, before she comes down—George, for ever."

"For ever," he repeated, and the pain in his voice stirred her down to her soul, and the tears welled to her eyes. Then both became ashen to the lips as footsteps echoed down the stairs and a gay voice humming a song penetrated the room.

"Quick! go through there! She will not meet you!"

And he went out into the snow.

Radiant with expectancy, Hilda glided into the room and put her arms round Jotchie's waist. Jotchie turned the lamp out, and Hilda said—

"How cold your hands are! Then it wasn't he?

Why have you put out the lamp?"

"It was an old friend of mine," Jotchie replied.
"Let us sit by the fire and wait!"

Reply Paid



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Reply Paid

SHE had received a letter in the morning begging her somehow to procure him a little money. Things were going badly, and he had been ill. She thought of it all day long, having despatched the little she had, and, for the thinking, things looked no better. Her brother had not enough to live upon, and there was an end of it. Fate was niggardly with them all. During the afternoon the girls came in, and Mrs. Mrs. Hamlin was always delightful and Her lovely dresses and sweet face and fragrant elegance reminded Maisie that at least she was the right person in the right place—with fitting surroundings, and the beautiful things of life, that all women instinctively claim as their right, hers. did not mean the actual material possessions, but these others, that, after all, in these days at any rate, wealth alone can procure.

"Maisie, you look preposterously dejected," said Mrs. Hamlin. "What is it? Are you in love with an Anarchist, or is it only general aspirations towards the impossible?"

"No, I am not in love; but I am thinking of proposing to some one."

"Why?"

"Because I am in a hurry. Fred, you know, is frightfully hard up."

"But why don't you accept Mr. Howard, when he's so devoted, poor man?"

"That wouldn't be fair, because, you see, he is devoted, and I-no, I think a fat man with a beard and glasses is the sort of thing-in the abstract."

"Oh, excellent in the abstract. Protects you, is kind to you, and gives you cheques. In the concrete

he-__"

"Dear Mrs. Hamlin, don't. The matter is not discussable in the concrete."

"Fancy Maisie proposing!" said one of the girls.

"You don't know what I am capable of," returned Maisie.

"I'll dare you, Maisie!" Mrs. Hamlin twinkled; "twenty pounds on, and I'll give you a month."

"Twenty pounds!" repeated Maisie, and there was an odd sound in her voice.

"Twenty pounds."

"Done!" she said, to the astonishment of the "It's a bet!" Every one sat up and bristled with delighted curiosity. Maisie, of all people, who invariably treated her swains with a good-tempered scorn that was the envy of her friends.

"I will do it now!" she went on excitedly: "Mabel, give me those telegraph-forms. Of course, I won't undertake to carry out the contract if any one accepts," she added.

"No, no; but a bond-fide proposal!"

She then sat down and addressed seven telegrams, and despatched them by the maid. "Reply paid," she said. "And now we'll have tea!"

"What have you done?" questioned Mrs. Hamlin.

"I have asked seven men to marry me!"

- "Seven?"
- "Yes. Law of averages, you see."
- "Maisie!"
- "Well, seven gentlemen will hardly be able to think that I am pining for them all; and they'll exchange notes."
 - "Men never do that."
- "Ah, what men never do, that surely man always does!" she laughed. "Honour with them is a collective virtue that has no application in the singular. You shall read the answers."

In due course of time the answers came. One by

one the girl opened them before her expectant friends who refused to go till all had come. "Regrets," quoted Maisie, holding up one with mock gravity. "Next, please. Ah! thank you, Susan! 'Sorry, previous engagement.'—'Alas! impossible!'—'Circumstances over which I have no control!'—'I would if I could, but I can't.'—'No!' That's rather impolite, and he really—well, one mustn't be kissed and tell. 'Twas so long ago, too. You see, ladies, how devoted my lovers all are; but I have won my bet. Ah, here is another—one more polite refusal. No! 'Of course I

spairing to care for any result so long as she could gain the twenty pounds for her brother—had passed.

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am honoured," she read. A crimson flush of shame spread over the girl's laughing face. The wild impulse of that moment's joke—the daring that had made her on the instant accept the challenge, and act upon it before time could sober the uncontrollable spirit of fun that had come to her in a mood too de-

Oddly enough, consciousness of what she had done came to her whimsical soul only on the receipt of an acceptance. "That's chivalrous of him," she said, trying to hide her embarrassment. "And now to invent a polite refusal to my own proposal."

Horace Sands was in chambers when Miss Maisie's telegram—reply paid—arrived. He was smoking a cigarette with Max Welby. They generally smoked together after lunch, in a kind of sympathetic silence. He read it slowly and then said, "God!" and then .(it must be recorded) "Damn!" After which, for him, unusual ejaculations, he went out of the room. On returning, his friend noticed an expression of most pathetic woe upon his placid features, and such a hang-dog look that he refrained from putting any questions from fear of intruding on private matters. Horace, however, after some fidgeting said, "You know, after all, it's a dreadful thing, but what could a fellow do? She's a charming girl, of course—but I didn't think of exactly—in fact, I am not a marrying man, you know-I never thought of marrying-don't know anything about it." He got up and paced the room. "I couldn't do anything else-a man would be such a beastly cad—but it's appalling all the same. I feel rather inclined to run a---"

"If you'll explain what you are talking about, I may be able to understand."

"Well, the fact is, Miss Maisie wired and asked me—don't you know; and I, of course——"

[&]quot;Asked you what?"



"Well, I suppose I oughtn't to say," he said, suddenly flushing crimson.

"Did she propose to you?" asked Welby with an incredulous look of amusement. "Answer paid, too. The devil she did! And you have accepted?"

"What else would you have me do?" returned Sands stolidly.

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For the next few days Horace Sands experienced a general sense of bewildering depression. He was an engaged man-to a very lovely girl, it was true, but nevertheless he was engaged, tied up, as it weresomebody's property. He must buy presents and rings, and think of furniture. Never in his life had he thought about furniture. Even at college he had not, as many of the men did, troubled how his diggings were arranged. He passed a man in the street carrying a kitchen safe. He tried to think what a safe was meant for, and realized that they would certainly have to have a safe. Some perambulators in a great shop caught his eye, and he blushed and looked obstinately on the other side of the road. He had postponed calling—he had not dared yet. He would never summon courage to behave as a lover should to such a wonderful piece of femininity. He remembered now that her eyes were grey, and serious, and laughing all at once; that she had a delightful, petulant mouth. The thought of her was The reality at present was terrifying. could not yet face his betrothed. He must have time to get used to himself under these new conditions, If she had only hit on Welby-Welby was an awful

decent sort. Still he wouldn't do, perhaps. Welby wasn't really good enough for her. Would she want a flat? No, he couldn't bear a flat. A little house, perhaps, with a garden, would be nice. They might live in the country part of the year. She would look awfully sweet in a flower garden! Another day passed. On the fourth he dressed himself in a frockcoat, adorned his buttonhole with a bouquet, and started for her house. When he arrived as far as the street in which she lived he turned round and went to the club. There, there was a note from her-three days old. Again he flushed, and thrust it into his pocket. He went out, and, in the busy traffic of the streets, read his first love-letter from Maisie. "Dear Mr. Sands,-How chivalrous and nice of you! It was a bet, you know." He did not read any more, but strode homewards. He had been a pretty kind of fool, anyhow—a vain ass, too. As if a beautiful girl like that—— Then he began to laugh. At any rate he was free again-free !-but somehow he wasn't quite sure that he wanted to be so very free. furniture had begun to interest him.

They met the next evening at Lady Vaughan's. She received him with a very bright smile, and they danced. They danced several times, and then he said at the end, "I suppose you couldn't care for me, could you?" And she coloured all over, and said, "Oh! no, I couldn't; not anyhow in the world!"

Fate threw them together. They constantly met. She tried to avoid him, but he would not let her, and she ceased at last to try. At the end of three months he again asked her to be his wife. The tears crept into her eyes then, and she said, "You are very kind

and chivalrous, and I am very grateful, but I can't, indeed I can't!" So that he went away conscious that there was a barrier between them he could not break down. He went abroad with Welby, and proved a preposterously dull companion.

"She will never have me!" he said one day irrelevantly. "I believe it's all because of that confounded telegram!"

- " Most likely."
- "What shall I do?"
- "Forget her."
- "That's what I have been trying to do, but she's crept somehow into my heart, and I can't."
 - "Wire, then!"
 - "What?"
 - "What she wired to you."

. . . .

Maisie was sitting with Mrs. Hamlin, and her pretty face was even paler than on the memorable occasion of the sending of the telegrams. "Ah!" she said, "it is a pity. I care for him so much—so much—and it could never be now! Could it?"

"It's rather difficult," said Mrs. Hamlin. "How mad of us all to have let you do it! We didn't realize till the things were gone. Your spirits carried us away. He's abroad, isn't he?"

"Yes, and I can't bear it, but I must; that's life, isn't it?" she said, with a little sad smile. "We all manage to bear what we can't." And then a telegram came, reply paid.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Hamlin.

"He has wired. Look!"

"And what are you going to say?"

The girl sat down upon her heels, on the floor, and looked first into the fire and then at Mrs. Hamlin. "I think I ought to be polite, don't you?" she said. "He was to me."

"Yes," said Mrs. Hamlin, "I think you should be polite!"

And Miss Maisie was.

The Misdemeanours of the Lady Gertrude

The Misdemeanours of the Lady Gertrude

THE poor tutor was alone with her; and though it was in the days when men fought hard battles even against their own kinsmen, if they thought it was for the right, his heart throbbed just as a tutor's heart might throb to-day, with the difference that he had not learnt to count its beats, as have our enamoured youth, two hundred years wiser, in a manner eminently conducive to the steadying of that organ. It must break bounds, he felt sure, in another minute; and for all that the disaster should cost him he could discover within himself no regret at its imminence, but on the contrary felt a certain audacious joy running riot in his blood. What mattered the great insurrection, the cruelties of Judge Jeffreys, and a fugitive patron, with a price upon his head, when Love had sought shelter in his heart, and she, to whom he had built a shrine, was just as far away from him as the width of the table! Of what consequence that she was the Lady Gertrude, the daughter of a noble conspirator, and he but a tutor without land or wealth! So he continued his story, looking at his book as if he were reading therefrom:

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" And the poor man loved the rich lady, and he dared not tell her of his love, lest she should scorn him."

"Then, surely he was fearful at a nothing, which methinks means he was a coward, Master Humphrey." interrupted the Lady Gertrude.

"A coward, if 'twere cowardly to fear the anger of

his lady," returned the student.

"Why should he expect such anger?"

"He had nought to offer her but his love."

"Love were wealth enough. But I am tired of your story. 'Tis not so good as you are won't to tell, Master Humphrey; and 'tis our last lesson," she added, very gently.

"You will not miss the lessons?" he said.

"No, not my lessons, only the stories,—I have loved some of them!" and she moved restlessly in her seat as if she would say more, yet could not find the words.

"But surely my father should be here even now?" she murmured at last.

The poor tutor turned pale. "You will go with him to Holland?" he said.

"It would be too great a risk to accompany him, but I follow to-morrow if all succeeds as we have planned—ah! if they should take him. They have killed the Duke-why are they not satisfied? Poor Monmouth!"

"They will not take him!"

"The king's soldiers are sparing none, and my father will be their prize. He loved Monmouth too well. Now at the last moment I am terrified lest things should go ill. Look at the time! Indeed, he should be here now?"



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The Lady Gertrude rose hastily, and stood tall even as the young tutor by her side—a look of eager impatience on her fair face.

"Not yet time, I think," said he. "To cross the

marshes on foot needs, indeed, an hour."

They stood irresolute, each with hearts for one another, and thoughts for the absent fugitive.

"There are learned men in Holland, I am told,"

stammered the young man irrelevantly.

"It is so rumoured; yet not more than that there would still be room for another, I am sure, Master Humphrey!"

Which pretty speech nigh overpowered the equanimity of Master Humphrey and threw him into a discourteous silence, like enough to pique his noble pupil, who, indeed, felt she had made too bold, and had lacked in modesty, since he would vouchsafe no answer.

"Continue your story, sir; I have no mind for lessons just now."

But the youth remained silent, and she set to humming softly to herself, and then at last said, with something of a sweet disdain,—

"Why art thou not a soldier when every one is astir, and courageous men are needed?"

"Why should I diminish their number?" said he, with a smile, feeling less afraid of her jibes than her kindness.

- "You would add to it."
- " By subtraction."
- " Of the enemy," she insisted.
- "Nay, nay, no Englishman is my enemy!"

"Traitors."

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" Misguided only!"

She looked oddly at him for a moment.

- "You have been in battle, Master Humphrey?" she asked.
 - "Aye!"
 - "And wounded?"
 - "I was wounded."
 - "Ah! tell me about it!"
- "'Twas nothing much: only I could not move for some timber that lay heavily across my body. It was night, and the battle over; and I thought, as I looked up into the silent heaven where the stars take no wot at all of such bloody wrangling down here, but forget not to make beautiful the firmament just as every day—I thought of those who might be weeping for me, and as my wound was flowing well, I deemed my end was not very far."
- "Oh!" gasped the Lady Gertrude wistfully; "but you got well—and went to her?"
 - "Why, no."
 - "You did not go to her?"
- "I had been dreaming—there was no one to weep for me!" Master Humphrey laughed. "That's why I think somehow I could not die."
- "Poor Master Humphrey!—Well, if I were a man I would be a soldier, and do great deeds, and fight great battles!"
 - "And kill great men!"
 - "No, only cowards and traitors."
- "Cowards and traitors rarely lurk on battlefields, Lady. If you would be a soldier you must needs kill only the brave."
 - "Well, well, I suppose those are the odds of war.

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Still, methinks I should like to be a soldier, were I a man, rather than sit stewing the live-long day over musty volumes."

"Nay, I think my pupil hath too much heart. After all 'twere not a pretty thing to cut to pieces thy fellow-creatures, and to bring sorrow to the hearts of women, and tears to their eyes no victory can assuage!"

- "Alas, 'tis true! Poor women!"
- "Sorrowing for loss of a brother."
- "Aye!"
- "For their husbands-for their fathers."
- "Enough! Go on with thy story."
- "Sometimes for their lovers!"
- "Pooh! but a tear or two for them, I am thinking, sir."
 - ." It has been known even more than that."
 - "Continue your story."
 - "There is no more to tell, my lady," he said.
 - "Then 'tis a poor story!"
 - "'Twas about a poor man."
 - "With a poor spirit!"
- "Nay, do not challenge him; for he hath an idea 'twere better to be poor-spirited than false-hearted."
 - "Why should he be either?"
- "Were it not a mean thing to harass an unprotected lady, and false to betray the trust of her noble parent, his patron, when he was absent risking his life for his country!"
- "To harass her would be wrong, sir; to betray a trust a worse wrong; yet I cannot see that, if he loved the lady well, he would be doing either of these things."

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"Madam, were I, your humble tutor, the poor man, would you still so reason?"

"Were you that man, Master Humphrey, I could but be sorry for the lady!"

"'Tis a fair answer: I crave your pardon! Shall we continue the translation?"

But the tutor's hands trembled as he turned a page. He did not dare to meet her gaze, for the sting of shame was blinding him: yet within the eyes of Lady Gertrude there lurked mischief, peeping from under her fringed eyelids in wanton audacity.

"Were you the man, in truth I should be sorry for the lady to have so inconstant a lover."

"Inconstant, madam?"

"Who will make love, wherever he may find a ready listener, though in covert language that saves him from a declaration. Pray, Master Humphrey, if it be as you declare, that you are this man, convey my sympathies to the lady!"

Now the tutor rose in wrath, and would have gone his way, for without doubt his mistress was making sport of him; but the sound of faint footsteps from behind the panelled wall arrested his attention, and he stood still considering whether 'twere best to go or stay.

"It is my father!" cried the girl.

Master Humphrey saw a look of joyful relief rise to her pretty face, and he remembered how brave she had been, how good and noble and fair she was, and how miserable a worm was he. So he lifted his head in the pride of humiliation, as humble-minded folk are wont to do, in such a manner that the Lady Gertrude found him as beautiful and arrogant

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as a king, for all his shabby clothes and slight stature.

"I may not see you again: he will cross to-day—I to-morrow," she said, in sudden haste.

"God be with you!" answered the tutor, and he bowed low.

She noted how white he looked, and the mischief died from the girl's eyes. She toyed with the lace handkerchief in her hands, then glanced hurriedly at the panelled door that must open in a moment.

"And will you please," said she somewhat haughtily, yet with a tremor in her voice that sounded strangely sweet to him, "give this to her from me!" Therewith she kissed the poor tutor on the cheek; and he would there and then have carried the message to the sweet lips so near, but she slipped from his grasp to the panelled door.

"Across the seas," said he, "I will take her the gift to-morrow,—maybe there will be room in Holland for a simple scholar."

The fugitive noble stood in the shadowy opening of the panelling, and Lady Gertrude, full of apprehension that he should stay too long, strained an ear to catch any ominous sounds from without, and drank in eagerly the detailed plans he slowly explained of his own escape to Holland, and her journey thither on the morrow by another route. He looked pale and tired, yet still had a smile for the girl who showed no fear though life and death were hanging in the balance. When he ended there was a little silence between them, as with those whose hearts are too full to speak.

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"You are not wounded?" she asked, with sudden apprehension.

"Not I; there's no room for any more wounds. Next thrust, and like a cracked plate I will go in two."

She laughed. "If you were a good housekeeper you would know that an old dish beseamed with cracks outlives all the new ones, whose worth has not been tried in wear. Even the gods have a sympathy for a well-used piece of crockery like you. See, they have brought you safe to me."

"No safety till we are across the sea."

"Oh! I'm frightened of the sea; you cannot fight it, or kill it, or cajole it, or even cheat it; and if it gets angry and you are there in its midst, it doesn't consider at all that you are only a guest, but it takes you down, down into its deep dungeons and leaves you there for ever and ever!"

"A better dungeon than Judge Jeffreys would entertain us in, child!"

"Oh! if we could only throw him into the ocean to be eaten by the fish!"

"He would befoul the water and poison even the monsters of the deep."

"What was that?"

"I did not hear anything!"

" Listen."

The silence was suddenly broken by a loud ringing of the great bell which reverberated from the deserted courtyard below, through the house. Surely the good Oliver had wrung it as a warning. The girl hastened to the casement window and looked quickly out.

"There are armed men," she said; "they have traced you here."

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"Wary hounds," he murmured, with a look of grim humour,—"to the hole, but not within. Twenty minutes, and I shall be beyond the most cunning ferret's scent. God be with you, little daughter! Keep them dallying here awhile. Remember tomorrow, at Ballam Bridge by nightfall, an escort will be awaiting you."

The panel fell back, and the Lady Gertrude sat down to her books, and made much pretence of mumbling to herself as the old doorkeeper, scarestricken and panting, tumbled into the room with an officer of the king's service on his heels.

"Please, my lady, the house is full of soldiers," said he.

"And, good Oliver, what is their will?" said she, not deigning to raise her eyes from her book.

"No harm to so fair a hostess!" exclaimed the intruder.

Whereat the Lady Gertrude slowly lifted her pretty head, and scanned the uncomely countenance and fat proportions of the officer with much deliberation.

"Should fairness diminish harm, sir, 'twere a pity there were not more of the quality among his majesty's servants."

"'Tis a dangerous wit that would challenge the king's army, madam."

"The army brooks so little danger, sir!"

"Not so the Lady Gertrude! But a truce, fair one, to the war of words; I am here to crave your hospitality whilst waiting for the presence of one who, I am informed, purposes to visit his daughter between the times of noon and midnight. You start! 'Tis now hardly noon. We demand to know, in the O.S.

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king's name at what precise hour that interview is to take place."

"Sir !"

"'Twere well, madam, to save that pretty head; for those who wilfully harbour the treacherous Monmouth's followers can receive no clemency from His Most Gracious Majesty King James. Their life is forfeit, man or woman."

"Sir," said the Lady Gertrude, after some moments of seeming fearful deliberation, "I await my lord my father here within one hour from now; and may God curse you for a coward."

The fat soldier grinned. This lady's bark was loud enough, but her bite was indeed most easily averted with a threatening whip, as is the way with women; so he sat his broad person down and did all that which he thought would beguile so pretty a shrew from her fretful humour.

"Since we must spend an hour together, why not a pleasant one?" he said with a leer.

"And you are waiting for my father!" she answered.

"Pooh! all must bear the penalty of rebellion." He paused for a moment, and then added: "Yet if his majesty had so fair a pleader, he would surely pardon even such a traitor."

"Sir, you can lie well."

"'Pon my honour, a soldier might be tempted to do worse for so fair a mistress."

The persecuted girl flushed crimson; and then with a sudden change of manner, as if some new intention had taken hold of her, she smiled on the fat colonel and called to Oliver to bring some wine. "I am not

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wrong in thinking that a soldier may be thirsty," she said.

"For something besides blood, eh?" he answered, and on draining the cup he added, "Even for thy favour, Lady."

"Our favour in times of war, sir, are not valued over much."

Now, hardly had she spoken, than news was brought by a breathless soldier that the Earl of W—— had boarded a frigate not fifteen minutes since, and, as was related in all seriousness, had doffed his hat in acknowledgment of the fiery salute from shore, and that he must have been here all but now. Whereat the fat colonel got up in a fearful rage and kicked and swore as only a gentleman soldier knows well how to do, and snarled aloud that nothing should save the cunning jade from the lively fate of Mistress Gaunt, who, indeed, was burnt to death for a lesser misdemeanour.

"Thou cunning, smirking, lying jade," he screamed. "Arrest the prisoner, and damnation on you all for idle fools! An hour hence. Ah! 'twas finely said. The flames shall not give you so long a breathing time, fair mistress. Their company shall teach you a short lesson of patience if a warm one, I warrant!"

But the Lady Gertrude lifted up her proud head and said,—

"Even so I shall deem my father's life most cheaply bought, sir." And she walked out between the file of armed men, who, indeed, were sorry for so brave and fair a creature taken thus roughly a prisoner.

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The poor tutor sat over his books in the upper room of a small dwelling-house and wrestled with his thoughts. Conscience and the devil were plaguing him in such a way that at last he knew not one from the other. In vain he tried to read, for the eyes of the Lady Gertrude looked up at him from between the lines. She had said that love was wealth. Yet his rooms betrayed no sign thereof: only poverty rose up about him and winked awry when he would fain insist that he was, as she had said, rich indeed. "A dream! it is a fool's dream." he murmured to himself; "but it keeps me sane, my fool's dream, which is surely a wise way of being a fool, friend Humphrey. 'She said, yes, she said love brings it's own wealth." He looked about him and counted his possessions on his fingers. "Item love, item books, item furniture—table, chair—item bed and chest, item one suit of clothes in chest, item one on, item linen, item a small estate worth fifty pounds per annum. 'Tis hardly wealth, I fear, dear Mistress."

Again he plunged into his book, and still his thoughts went helter-skelter their own way, when hurried footsteps upon the stairs became confused with his wandering fancies, and, ere he had time to consider who might be coming thus hastily, the Lady Gertrude stood before him with such a look of mingled fear and mischief on her sweet face that he set at once to trembling from the self-control he must needs exercise on the man of him that would perforce have taken her there and then in his arms.

"You are pale, methinks, Master Humphrey," she

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said most airily, as if 'twere quite a common thing thus to visit a young man in his apartments.

"Your servant, madam," said he.

- "I am afraid I have come to stay, and unless you give me a little better welcome I shall begin to feel I should have sought shelter elsewhere."
 - "Shelter?"
 - "I should not have sought you otherwise, sir."
- "Ah! Lady, tell me; I am burning with anxiety. What has happened?"

And then something of a sweet shyness came over her, so that all in a great hurry she set to explaining how she had been taken prisoner by the irate colonel. How they had a notion to roast her as they did poor Mistress Gaunt, and how she had another notion on the matter.

- "But you, how did you get away?" exclaimed Master Humphrey.
 - "There was a captain as well."
 - "A captain!"
- "Richard Howard—I—he—well, we knew one another long ago. He used to think that I—at any rate, he swore—he swore mighty oaths he would not let me go. I knew I was safe when I heard the oaths!" she laughed. "How he fumed and walked up and down, and gave me a long sermon on a man's honour, and his country, his uniform, and every other queer obstacle to his saving a helpless woman from being burnt! 'Pooh,' said I, 'you're a coward, and you know it, or you wouldn't make such a noise.' Well, he gave me half a chance, and I took the other half, and the guards, methinks, were but half-hearted custodians—and here I am."

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Then the boy and girl—for they were not much else—looked into one another's eyes, as they had looked these many past days during the lesson he had been set to teach her, and now that there was no table between them he knelt down, and taking both her little white hands in his, he covered them with humble kisses which the lady seemed to have no desire to resent.

"So after all, Master Humphrey, you must needs take charge of your pupil still a little longer. To-morrow at Ballam Bridge at nightfall there will be those waiting to conduct me to Holland, where I think, sir, you told me you had a mind to follow in search of further learning. Yet, till then, must I remain a prisoner here for fear of my very life," laughed she.

Then the poor tutor arose in sudden anxiety, and said, "Were you seen to enter here?"

She answered that some children were loitering on the steps, and that she remembered a young man in shabby clothes did stare at her. "He had a hungry look, so that I would have given him a piece of silver, but that I was in too great a hurry."

"There are spies enough to make the whole place dangerous," said he; "poor wretches, too, who become such for bread-and-butter, so distressful are the times."

Now, hardly had Master Humphrey spoken than a clamour without sent the blood from his cheeks, and fear at last into the dauntless eyes of the Lady Gertrude.

"Quick! within; God help us, there is no way out!" said he, and thrust open the door of the narrow

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chamber and closed it upon her. Then the steady tramp of men's feet echoed upon the winding stair.

"In the king's name!" said a tall officer, as he entered the room followed by several men-at-arms. There was a strange look in his eyes as he met the tutor's gaze, and he faltered in his speech whilst repeating the common formula.

"There is no one here," answered the student

deliberately.

"The Lady Gertrude was seen-"

"Captain Richard Howard, if I am not mistaken?" said Master Humphrey.

"That is my name, sir."

"I congratulate you on your errand."

For a moment the two men looked at one another.

"It is necessary the place should be searched," replied the officer unflinchingly, "and I must warn you that, if the prisoner be found, your life will be forfeited without trial, as a traitor harbouring those in conspiracy against his majesty's crown."

"There is no one here," repeated the tutor.

"Full pardon is granted to those who voluntarily give up any hidden rebel within their abodes."

"There is no one here," again repeated the tutor.

A moment's silence fell among the group.

"Search," said the officer. He had grown pale as the poor youth, who, meanwhile, bent with seeming indifference over his books, yet longed to spring at the throats of these armed men and with his hands hurl a half-dozen thereof down the stairway, but deemed 'twere wiser to remain quiet, for the men were many and he but one against them, so that for his lady's sake he bit his lips and clung close to his

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chair as the men approached the little door. A moment passed that seemed an eternity. Then it opened suddenly from within, and a beautiful youth in a velvet suit, with fine lace ruffs, and a mass of brown curly hair, falling negligently about his shoulders, such as was then the fashion to affect, confronted the officer.

"What noisy matter is this?" said he haughtily.

"Is there no peace even for students, who, loyal to his majesty, claim but the quiet of their chambers to peruse the books which tell of mightier deeds than those of the internal wars of a discontented people?"

Now a look of humour crept into the officer's eyes, as he bowed perhaps lower than was necessary to so

young and haughty a youth.

"I am grieved so to disturb you, sir," said he.
"We have been misinformed, for apparently the lady
we seek is not here!" and he turned upon his heel
and departed with his men from the lowly roof of the
poor tutor.

"Master Humphrey," said the beautiful youth—and his face was now crimson as the skies after the sun hath set—"you risked being hung on high, Master Humphrey, for me." And there were tears in his eyes.

"Lady, 'twas a paltry thing to risk."

"Aye, 'tis a paltry thing, yet the paltry thing I want, Master Humphrey, though 'tis shame to make a woman say so."

Then, indeed, did nearly all Master Humphrey's fortitude depart, and he bowed his head as one ashamed; and within himself he thought, "Now, indeed, I cannot woo her, for 'twould be the way of a



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coward thus to force advantage of a maid's gratitude." But whilst he was pondering she stole up to him, and he knew not how it happened, but he wooed her just the same.



A Way Out



A Way Out

I RECEIVED a note from Aninee, begging me to go at once and see her, for she was in the direst predicament, so she wrote, and was despairing. I went at once, of course—I always obey Aninee's commands, even when she isn't in distress, which, I gathered from her hasty epistle, was her case at present.

"You frightened me out of my senses," I said as she greeted me, looking particularly roseate and shamelessly good-looking. "Despair becomes you!"

"Oh! don't be unkind, Dison. If you knew what I am suffering!"

" I am all ears."

"Well, sit down, do."

She stood leaning against the mantelpiece, with a genuine effort at a frown on her naturally smooth brow, whilst I sank into a deep armchair. Miss Aninee always confessed from the pulpit, as it were, with little intervals of walking up and down the room, and though I was enthroned judge and counsellor and priest in one, I was never allowed to say very much.

"What's the matter?" I murmured.

She darted a look of pathetic entreaty, yet something comical lurked behind the look that forced a laugh from me before I could properly assume the

grave countenance she invariably expected on these occasions.

"You may just as well begin by laughing," she said, really pathetic this time, "because once I tell you you'll simply be unbearable."

"Does it concern me?" I demanded in some trepi-

dation.

"I wish it did," she answered, and we fell into a silence which lasted for at least three seconds.

"It's a most awful thing, anyhow!" she exclaimed at last, "and the worst of it is, you'll only laugh."

I promised a becoming gravity.

"Well," she said suddenly, with a rush, "I have had four proposals this week."

"That seems a good record. I don't see anything to complain of. I suppose you want my advice as to which to accept?"

"No, it isn't that. I—I accepted them all!"

"What! All four?"

"In a sort of way. I led each one to think it would be all right, you know!"

"There's safety in numbers, at any rate."

"I knew you'd make fun!"

"I am not making fun in the least. . . . I don't think it's funny—only——"

"Don't you understand what a dear Jack Forde is?" she interrupted. "We were brought up together, you know. . . ." A tell-tale flush spread over her face. (She cares for him really, I decided.) "Well, when one's with Jack one does like him dreadfully—he is so young and high-spirited and devoted, I think. . . ."

[&]quot;Next, please."

- "Then there's Walter Fielding."
- "Don't know him."
- "No!" She gave a little sigh. My surmise about Jack must have been wrong. "Well, he paints the most lovely pictures in the world, and I am so happy when I am in his studio. I think I should love to marry a painter. They are not conventional, you know, and he thinks I have got pretty feet—it's only the shoe really; but I do care for him. He's——"
- "Proceed, Miss Aninee," I urged. "I, too, have remarked the feet."
- "Ah! that's nice of you. Well—Sir Julian Clifford!" . . .
 - "He's fifty!"
- "I know, but he loves me so—he loves me more than all the others put together. And he seems to consider it such an honour that I should care for him, and I can't tell you how wonderful that is to a woman. He has such beautiful grey eyes too, and he never takes one for granted. I think I love him rather desperately!"

"Go on!"

A dreamy look crept into her eyes; she hesitated, then gave a little short, quick laugh.

- "This is the one, after all," thought I.
- "It's Reginald Mason."
- "That prig!"
- "Oh, I know you're all down upon him because he's much cleverer than most of you. There's something in him that fascinates me oddly. He's different from any one else in the world, and so witty! Then, at the most unexpected moments one catches a note

of pathos in his tone, something of a latent sadness which makes one feel one would do anything in the world just to make him happier."

"I congratulate you, Miss Aninee!" I said, rising. "Only, which is it to be?-because I haven't in the least guessed: as you say they are all so charm-

ing."

"That's the difficulty. I like them all in so totally different a way. You see, there are three kinds of men with regard to matrimony: the man one knows at once one would marry and love for ever; the man one thinks one might love; and the man one simply couldn't anyhow; now, unfortunately, my four fiancés all come under the second heading."

"Has no one ever come under the first?"

She looked at me for several moments considering: then she laughed—"Why, yes, only they never like one."

"That's a difficulty, of course . . . though I should have thought——" Here some afternoon callers sailed into the room, and for some moments we were separated. She came back to me, however, on the appearance of her sister, and murmured,-

"Do, do suggest something!"

"Give me a week," I said.

"So long?"

"A week!" I repeated, and we said good-bye. I met Sir Julian Clifford on the stairs. He was cer-

tainly very good-looking.

The week duly elapsed, and I heard again from Aninee. "Things much worse," she wrote. "Four letters every morning of entreaties for a definite answer. Four bouquets every evening. I can't bear

it any longer. Tell me, for pity's sake, what to do. They are all awfully kind."

"Dear Miss Aninee," I answered, "I am extremely busy, but meet me to-morrow at the corner of M——Street, at twelve o'clock. I have thought of a good plan, only you must have courage, otherwise I cannot help you."

She was there ten minutes late.

- "How absurd of you to make me come here!" she said; "and how pale you look! and so smart."
- "Miss Aninee," said I—my voice was slightly trembling—"you see that house?"
 - "Yes," said she; "but what---"
 - "That's a registrar's office."
- "Oh, dear! Are any of them about? 'Cause I really can't. It's awfully good of you—but I really can't—not even Walter Fielding. And I do care——"
 - "None of them are about," I said.
 - " Well ?"
- "You devil!" I paused a moment; she looked up a little frightened. "Will you marry me?"
 - "Dison!"
 - "Will you marry me now?"
 - "But, Dison!"

We crossed the road.

- " Now!"
- "I think you are very unkind. I like a proper wedding with bridesmaids."
- "You shall have that after." We were at the door. She turned suddenly white and walked in, with her little head very erect. When we came out (I don't think I have ever seen anything quite so lovely as she looked) she said, "Dison, you came under the

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first heading." I put her in a cab, and she drove home alone. Three weeks later we were married at St. George's, Hanover Square. They were all there.

Theo

Theo

"MISS THEODORA," said the maid. Theo took a letter from the salver, then closed the door quickly. On noticing the handwriting an expression of sudden emotion caught the corners of her mouth. She opened the note hurriedly, glancing over her shoulder as if she were afraid some one might steal in upon her. As she grasped the meaning of the words, wave upon wave of pallor swept across her countenance. On finishing she turned the page and carefully read it again. There was not one word of love, not one word of pity. The past was a lie, then? The crimson of shame leapt over her scared face, to leave it colourless as white marble. She stood still. Downstairs in the drawing-room her mother was reading; in the library the father was smoking; on the stairs the sound of her brother's footsteps passed; vet a desolate loneliness weighed on all her senses and numbed her to her finger-tips. Then she continued to dress.

Lady Normer's wide street door was thrown open, and Theo entered alone. The rustle of her long black gown, the respectful attitude of the menservants, and her power to control the great pain in

her own heart, oddly forced upon her consciousness the fact that youth was not hers any more, that twenty-seven long years dated back to her birthday, that she looked older, felt older, and was older than her years. A fat man behind a narrow table coloured with sweet-cakes and striped sandwiches, suddenly shouted, "Tea or coffee?" She looked up, and realized that she was the only one in the ante-room.

"Tea," she answered, in an equally business-like tone, and seized upon a green sandwich. minutes passed whilst she consumed the sandwich she did not want, and drank the tea she had no thirst for. Absolute silence had reigned in the room. Surreptitiously the fat man had eved her and she had eyed the fat man. He had a look of humour in his eves which was kept reassuringly in obeisance by the placidity of his compressed lips. She would have liked to ask him if he had anything on the Derby which was to be run the next day, and if it were a nice party upstairs; but the law of the Medes and Persians forbade intercourse between the fat hired servant and her own elegantly dressed person. She turned round and followed another solemn attendant upstairs; then the good butler received her at the top, and shouted out her name. She shook hands with her hostess, and afterwards with a pretty American. "I want to come and see the baby, she said.

"Well, that's not difficult; we are all there on Sundays."

"Oh, I should like to come when no one's there.

The American twinkled. "If you'll let us know the day, why, we'll just file out," she said. Theo



looked at her absently. She had caught sight of a face through the crowd of well-born, dowdily-dressed, thin-necked gentlefolks—a young girl's face with the dream of anticipatory pleasure in her eyes. She steered near her, knowing the dainty creature would have nothing to say, but how much more charming her nothing would be than the purposeless chatter of older, garrulous mediocrity assembled to improvise variations on the weather, how-do-vou-do, and the festivities of the season to which they were or were not going! Her host interrupted her progress. A genuine smile of pleasure rippled over her face. She chaffed him, and he listened and blushed; he found she could talk more nonsense in one breath than most people did in a dozen; but it was amusing nonsense, and it was nice to talk friendly nothings in this conventional crowd. He was taken from her, however, by a clamorous guest, and she stood looking over the people's heads in a thoughtless, wondering way. There were very few people she knew, and those she did know she hoped would not see her. She was nevertheless assailed by several pressing persons, to whom she laughed some audacious flippancy which made them move on hurriedly lest they should have to answer what they did not understand. Then the young misanthrope sought another room where only two or three intimates were regaling one another with witticisms at other people's expense. She threw in a word, then sat down wearily. Her eyes fell upon a man among them whom she did not know. He looked interesting. "Who is he?" she asked the sister of their hostess.

"Why, Grey!"

"The painter?"

A keen sense of interest thrilled her. She challenged her friend with a look for an introduction.

Her friend ignored the glance, and shortly departed' into the crowd. Theo laughed to herself, and forgot she wanted to be introduced in the sudden shock of delight at the appearance of a black cat on the threshold of society. At the end of a long polished floor of the comparatively empty room, the winsome creature peered in round a half-open door, and gazed with a philosophic scorn at the crowded room beyond: then it turned slowly round and retreated. If she could only follow it away, down the dark back stairs. through the deserted sculleries, out on to the cool leads of the stables and away over the roofs of the houses; away, away to the end of the world in a night ramble of contemplative exploration! . . . Sir Henry Normer was monopolising Grey now. Why didn't he introduce her? Sir Henry never introduced any one-not because, happily for him, it was not the thing to do, but from sheer inability to take the initiative under any circumstances. How shy he was! Shy in a cool, aristocratic way. He would probably consider it improper to introduce her, she thought, and, tickled at the notion, she rose slowly to her feet, and walked demurely across the floor to "Will you introduce me to Mr. Grey?" she said, with a toss of her chin. The men shot apart for a moment, and the introduction followed.

"I am such an admirer of your work, Mr. Grey—I hoped you might have asked to be introduced to me, but you didn't, so I had to be introduced to you."

Sir Henry blushed furiously, and crept away like a shamefaced schoolboy.

The painter and writer scanned each other for a long moment. She regretted her impulse. He was amused, but she divined an undercurrent of resentment and dislike for her. She talked quickly, even hurriedly—to save the inevitable pause—a flow of rapid speech falling from her lips. He caught at her suggestions, and responded with quaint aptness. Her broken spirit was stimulated by the intoxication of a challenged wit on guard. The gnawing pain at her heart gave a reckless inconsequence to what she dared say. He was brilliant, she only audacious. At last her spirits began to fall. He gave a sudden thrust insidious, witty, and provokingly impersonal withal. She laughed a ringing, genuine laugh, but the current of repartee was arrested for a moment. Stephens passed them; they alluded to her clever work. "All women write now; I think it is a mistake," said Theo; then she wondered if he knew that she herself wrote.

"I think so too," he said. "You know, women talk so much better than they write. As a rule they don't write so well as men, but they talk with far more finish and variation."

"They write well enough sometimes," she answered with a laugh. "My objection is that it makes them ugly. Beauty is so rare and important to us, it should not be spoilt by a trade."

"Is it writing that makes them ugly?"

"Or their being ugly that makes them write, you mean. Oh, they write because they are ugly, only you mustn't divulge!"

"You don't think, then, that Providence gave one person the gift of beauty, the other the talent of expression, in a kind of wonderful order of compensation?"

She hesitated a moment. "Indirectly, perhaps; but the pretty woman would write quite as well if she became ugly; she is not necessarily less talented, only her life is full of love and admiration, her thoughts occupied with pleasing pastimes to be selected from the many offered for her beauty's sake, so that she has not the time or occasion to think of abstract things."

"You take for granted that the plain woman is not loved?"

"The plain woman may be loved by one maneven by two," she added quaintly; but that is not the love I alluded to, the love that colours every detail of a beautiful woman's life. I remember a man telling me how he once went to see the woman he worshipped, and how she received him with the exclamation that she was exceedingly busy with her lovers. 'Go and see them,' she said, and he went, he assured me, with undignified precipitation. The other room was full of people. Old women, children, young damsels, a parson, etc. It was her birthday, and they had all come to greet her. They said she had been kind to them—he thought so too. It is not difficult to be kind when one's loved. She had given them her beauty, that was all, and love from man, woman, and child was hers for the asking. Plain women dream of such things, and write books."

The painter laughed. "You know," he said, "I am told that the ugliest women of one's acquaintance

invariably think themselves good-looking. I suppose, really, they only find out they are plain when they discover that time is going on, and they are still unloved. It is never the looking-glass that tells them the secret."

"Ah, don't, don't!" Theo exclaimed. "Where will we end? Let us go back to the non-sense."

"I thought we were still at the nonsense," he answered.

"The nonsense that is true, the nonsense that is tragic—I prefer the nonsense that is only witty."

She rose, and, looking over her shoulder with the same bright laugh with which she had greeted him, rejoined the crowd in the other room; but now and then her resonant laugh reached his ears, her long black gown swept past his feet, and her raised chin and impertinent mouth made him conscious of the audacious sallies in his neighbourhood.

* * * *

Theo stepped out of the hansom, and opened the door of her home with a latchkey. She hesitated before closing it, afraid to be once again alone with herself. Could she not somehow escape this terror of her own company? She heard the wheels of the cab roll away—the last possible sound of human companionship—and slipped the latch. For a moment she swayed on the narrow tips of her heels, then slowly mounted the stairs. Up, up, she went to her own little room at the top of the house. She turned the bead of gas into a blaze: it made an uncanny sound. She watched it a moment, then regulated

the tap. She moved to her desk and handled some manuscripts. She had been ambitious long agothat, too, was gone now. She was alone indeed! She crossed the room to the dressing-table, and looked at her face in the glass. The glass had never told her the secret. She passed her white hand across its surface with a kind of loving gratefulness. "Women only know the truth when they are not loved." Her hand slipped from the glass on to a little bottle containing a narcotic. The touch of it brought back the old doctor's words, "It is a dangerous remedy-don't take an overdose"-and she had laughed. She began to undress. The little clock on the mantelpiece seemed to tick with wanton brutality. No hope, no hope, it seemed to din in her ears. She smothered it up in a shawl and hid it away; but when she was in bed, and the gas was out, and the air seemed to lie about her in oppressive weightiness so that she could hardly breathe, its smothered sound reached her: Tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick-no hope, no hope. Was she going mad? Their hearts would never beat near one another's. The dream had been a lie—a lie. Tick, tick, tick. She laughed suddenly. What a ludicrous thing, to have been plain and never to have known it!

The Death of the Profligate



The Death of the Profligate

A STRANGE sense of disquietude took possession of Ralph Segwell the moment he heard that she was of the house party. He did not know that Lady Wallace had asked her, and felt angry with his fair young hostess for the indiscretion. He had come North to get away from a past of which he felt no inclination to be reminded. The presence of Mary Clifford dragged it back with a pathetic instance he was unable to resist. As he saw her emerge from the embrasure of a heavily curtained window and stand looking up with a frightened expression in her childlike eyes, he found himself more embarrassed than he cared even to admit to himself. She was a woman just like other women, easily conquered. loving, forgiving. He had taken advantage of her as he had taken advantage of others, only she-well there was the only, that was all, and it made the whole difference in his meeting with her now.

"Mr. Segwell is taking in Mary Clifford," said a pretty American. She meant he was looking at her with more than ordinary interest.

"If he has not already," answered her companion.

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"Why, no, I guess not; Ralph has deceived us all, of course, some time or other; even I worshipped at the shrine in my youth, but Mary Clifford hasn't the look of one of his victims. Her pure little face is a sort of contradiction to all his ideas of women. Men dislike being so radically contradicted; he would hate her."

"What is the fascination in Segwell?"

"Don't you feel it?"

"Well, I admit I do—but I am a man! He has a simple, frank way with us that is winning—but——"

"Ah, with us it's his complexity. He's enigmatic and melancholy, and has a low voice." She raised her glasses and screwed up her pretty eyes to get a better view of him across the long room. He was standing moodily alone. Miss Clifford had disappeared. "How he suits this old house!" she continued. "I always think he's a little out of place in the everyday world—out of the picture. You know the first time I saw Ralph Segwell I realized there was such a thing as concrete evil. He's the only real specimen I know. We talk a good deal about bad things and read bad books, and we are shamelessly frivolous, but I think, on the whole, modernity's very good, don't you?"

"Some of you have a ferocious bark, Miss Swift!"

"Most person's bark is worse than their bite. Ralph Segwell's bite is much worse than his bark. I guess that's why he's so uncanny. In fact, he never barks at all—he just walks up to one in a friendly sort of way, and bites."

"He ought to be labelled 'dangerous'-or muzzled."

"A moral muzzle?"



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"Yes, you might think of a patent. Your compatriots are clever at that sort of thing!"

"It would be remunerative, but not efficacious," she said, with a twinkle.

"I don't grasp!"

"You would all wear them. You like to be thought bad if you are or not; we'd still be in the dark. Here's Lady Wallace; how pretty she's looking! I think it's rather bad manners of one's hostess to be so extraordinarily pretty. It's like over-dressing; she puts one to shame!"

"You wicked people, what are you laughing at?" interrupted Lady Wallace. "Every one else in the room is drooping with melancholy!"

"We were discussing Mr. Segwell's malefic influence over tender youth!"

"Ah, Mr. Segwell! He's a new interest. An old friend of Miss Clifford's. He's nice, isn't he?"

"He has silenced your drawing-room, Lady Wallace—ample evidence of charm."

"Oh! I thought it was hunger—I was going to scold James. How delightful! Is it really emotion? My house party should be a success."

"It depends upon whom you have consigned to the haunted room," said Miss Swift. "I wanted desperately to be in it. I am just crazy to make friends with a real English ghost."

"Mr. Segwell has it."

"Of course, I ought to have known. It's a little way he has of always getting the good things of this world. It is rather mean of him, though—he ought to be satisfied in looking just part of the place without monopolising the pleasures!"

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"Poor Mr. Segwell! I assure you he is quite unconscious of his monopoly. We never tell our guests, then nothing ever happens, they sleep too soundly."

"But what happens if you do tell them?"

"Thrilling stories at breakfast one has heard before."

"Lady Wallace, you are a disbeliever! You don't deserve this real lovely, uncanny place. I got lost this afternoon in one of those interminable passages which seem to intersect the house through and through. My own footsteps reverberated as if some one were following me, and those black imps on the wainscotting deliberately grinned at my dismay. I pretended not to mind at all, and prepared myself for the ghost. The ghost wasn't appreciative—he didn't come."

"There isn't a ghost, you know!" said Lady Wallace; "there's only a door. Mr. de la Motte, will you take in Miss Swift?"

Miss Swift looked incredulous. "Do tell me about the door."

"Oh! it's an abominable obtrusive thing," said De la Motte. It forces its personality, or *doorality*, on you unasked. It has never been opened, to any one's knowledge, for hundreds of years, and no human power can force it, and nothing ever happens."

"Where is it supposed to lead?"

" No one knows."

"It sounds wonderful! I like it much better than a ghost. It's a creepy place, anyhow!" she added, as they descended the wide stairs to dinner.

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"I asked Mary Clifford, to please you," said Lady Wallace.

They were sitting in the great hall, and Ralph noticed how beautiful his young hostess was looking, and how her burnished copper hair gleamed against the dark oak.

- "I wish you had not," he said in a low voice; "indeed, I wish you had not!"
 - "You were such friends?"
 - " Has the were no significance to you?"
 - "You are not any more, then?"
 - " No."
- "I am sorry. It's a hostess's duty to know these things. I apologise."
 - "Please don't. We are friends enough, you know."
 - "Poor Mary Clifford, I think I am sorry for her."
 - "You need not be. Don't let us talk of her."

Lady Wallace observed a weary expression settle on his face. Her sympathies were touched. For some moments there was a silence. When their eyes met a flush spread over her cheeks; she smiled with that winning, intimate grace that is daring without being bold. "How shall I atone?"

Their hands were dangerously near: he looked at the tapering fingers glittering with costly rings, then up at the laughing mouth. "You are charming!" he said irrelevantly, then suddenly he rose to his feet. At the far end of the dimly lit hall a little white figure passed and went up the staircase; then he sat down again.

- "Why did you get up?"
- "I don't know . . . I don't know."
- "It was Miss Clifford who passed."

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"Was it?" he answered indifferently. "I was thinking," he continued, after a moment, "about atonement. How we all hasten to atone in small matters with an instinctive hope that we may be let off the greater."

"I don't know, I think I should like to bear penalties. It would make me feel that things mattered. I am sure that is why Roman Catholics are so happy, they are so busy and important carrying their crosses, and feeling what dreadful things they have done. I never feel I have ever done anything dreadful—not that that would count very much to the Almighty."

"He doesn't give you a conscience lest he should

spoil so beautiful a handiwork."

"That's charming of you. I like pretty speeches, they are so out of date; like first editions, they are delightful because they are so rare; they have no intrinsic value, sir!" She put her hands behind her head and laughed at him. The gauzy draperies of her sleeves fell back displaying her arms. Her feet stretched a little bit from under the clinging skirts. She looked like a sleepy panther. "So I have no conscience?"

"No, you witch, nor have I!"

"You had better just now," she answered, still laughing as Lord Wallace strolled up.

* * * * *

Some hours later Lord Wallace conducted Ralph Segwell to his room with a formality eminently fitting the old-world place. He maintained the customs of his grandsires with astonishing exactness.

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On the threshold of the gloomy chamber, which seemed to be situated in a deserted wing of the building, he expressed a hope that his guest would find all he required, and solemnly bid a good-night. The two men stood facing one another; then he said, after a moment's hesitancy, with a wave of the hand, "It doesn't lead anywhere," and turned sharply on his heel. Left alone, Ralph stared into the flame of his candle, and smiled on recollecting the beautiful young hostess he had not long left-modern from the crown of her pretty head to the heels of her dainty feet. His heart beat with remembrance of the softer woman she had revealed in a momentary flash of her odd, tan-coloured eyes—eyes like a tiger's. From her his thoughts wandered to the house party nineteenth century men and women, effervescing with spontaneous epigram—locked up in the vast, gloomy rooms; separated by the tortuous passages that had a little earlier resounded with the laughter of young, audacious femininity, challenging the ancestral ghost to play his part for the perfecting of her Christmas festivities. How strangely the place dominated the people! The old house seemed the significant fact. the infesting butterflies but shadowy things-unimportant, coloured pigmies, inhabiting for a brief hour this great sombre pile. He looked up. strangely oppressive! He noticed a door, that had escaped his observation in the afternoon, facing him, and concluded that his host's ambiguous remark on departing had relation to it. With instinctive curiosity he hastened to try the handle, which assuredly resisted his pressure; then he turned away, a cold shudder passing over him as he crossed the immense

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room. The wax candles, stuck in heavy silver candelabras, gave only a dim light, and spluttered at intervals—the darkness beyond was intensified by their feeble glimmer. The fire in the grate had little inclination to burn, and there were no pictures on the walls to relieve the monotony of the dense panelling, whilst the vaulted ceiling receded into vague, unwonted shadows. He turned his head suddenly and looked at the locked door. "What a miserable, wretched hole they had consigned him to!" A wild desire to sneak away and seek refuge for the night in the smoking-room became almost irresistible. It was an odd experience to feel the coward.

He undressed with slow deliberation, but every other moment he found himself looking at the door that led nowhere: it fascinated his attention, absorbed his senses, and by degrees filled him with an inexplicable dread. He did not dare turn his back. He watched with fixed intensity as he gradually divested himself of his things. If for a moment he glanced away, he hurriedly looked up again. Always the door, this strange, awful door met his eyes. He crawled into bed like a hunted creature; but his consciousness was filled with the spectacle of the dark, ominous door: every nerve of his body, every sense of his being, was concentrated on the one thought, an appalling, sickening reality—the door that led nowhere.

Unable to rest, he flung out of bed, stirred up the fire to a blaze, and lit every candle in the room. As he held the match to each one, he looked with renewed fear over his shoulder; then he placed a chair near the fire, yet facing the dreaded quarter, and sat

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down, determined to watch till daylight; but with inactivity, and the dead silence, and the blaze of light, the strange, incomprehensible terror returned with added intensity. The sound of his own breathing became painful. He thought of Mary Clifford, then something moved. He sat still as one paralyzed; his blood romped through his veins, and icy hands seemed to grip his heart-strings. The handle before him turned, and the door that had not opened for a hundred years swung back, and a man slowly walked into the room. He was dressed in evening clothes, and seemed to all appearance like other men but for a startling expression in his grey eyes. Ralph rose to his feet. Relieved from the terror of uncertainty, he found himself overpowered by a sense of dismay. He waited tongue-tied, whilst his visitor walked to the fireplace and sat down.

"I can give you an hour," he murmured.

There was a silence.

"What for?" said Ralph at last.

"To live," he answered indifferently.

It leapt to Ralph Segwell's mind that he was entertaining a madman. The house was full, which necessitated the using of this room. The mysterious door was undoubtedly the entrance to the apartments of some insane relative. His own previous apprehensions must have been caused by a latent consciousness of a human presence a stone's throw from him. The thought of his solitude in the dead of the night with a homicidal maniac was sufficiently unmanning; he turned pale, but said with assumed airiness,—

" Why?"

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"Justice," answered the stranger, slightly raising his brows. His eyes were bent on the ground.

"Why not two hours?"

"That would be purposeless! No human soul ever accomplishes anything in the second hour; he simply goes over the old ground. Take the hour justice gives you. It should be the most profitable one of your life."

Ralph remained silent. Justice! he pondered; there was no such thing as justice. We live and die, and love and hate, and give in charity; but justice—! "Justice," he repeated under his breath, "is a purchasable figure-head we erect for show over our public buildings. A coin we pay to compensate for a greater injustice." He laughed to himself. "Why, you are charming!" he exclaimed; "your justice varies in no way from our saner soul's sense of it. You propose to commit the injustice of taking my life, and for justice's sake offer me an hour to live. You are not peculiar, only you play for higher stakes," he said whimsically.

"Justice," said the madman, "is the principle of creation, the foundation of Nature's laws. You could not live an hour but for the active intervention of justice."

"Through the preposterous survival of the fittest?" said Ralph.

"Can you see," he went on, ignoring the interruption, "those figures there hurrying to and fro? Do you notice that each carries a light burning in his breast. Some flicker low, others burn steady and bright, a few flame high, many have gone out. The light is the spirit of life. Every man and woman

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carries such, and according as they feed the flame so do they attain immortality. Should the light wane and go out before death, the soul perishes, the individual is extinct. They suffer not; they are as nothing, choosing death rather than life." He paused; a momentary flare from the fire lit up the white, passionless physiognomy, which seemed dead but for the gleam of the inexorable eyes. Ralph shivered.

"Severally," he went on, "spirit and matter are merely potent ingredients; united they give birth to the individual. The individual cultivates the spirit and lives for ever; he neglects it, and dies with disintegration."

"Your explanation is delightful! The spiritual survival of the fittest!"

" Precisely!"

"How do you propose to take my life?"

"Through your imagination."

"Through my imagination?"

"I shall look at you." He glanced up; Ralph shrank from the gaze, then said, with a ghastly attempt at a smile,—

"Well, I hope my light still burns. I cling to life, you know, here and hereafter. I shall fight for that second hour." The smile withered on his lips as his visitor again turned his terrible gaze from the fire to him.

"Mary Clifford has saved your soul, profligate." The voice reverberated through the room, the walls echoed back "profligate," and his own lips moved to utter the word; but he said softly under his breath, "Mary Clifford," and the sound was as water to a thirsty man.

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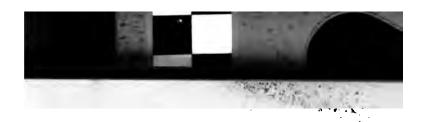
"The pure love that she alone was able to wake in you, and that still lives in your heart, though you do your utmost to stifle it under the clogging weeds of gross passions, has kept burning the flame of your spiritual life!" He bent forward, "Another woman here would stifle it again, this time for ever, and it would kill her you have wronged, but," he ended with

a shrug, "you will die to-night."

Rålph sat still a long time looking at his uncanny companion, trying to guess how knowledge of the details of his cown life had reached him. Was this mad philosopher, whose method contained something of poetic justice, a friend of hers? And even so, how had he divined that she still held the greater place in his heart, though he had been faithless and wantonly cruel to her. He dropped his chin on his breast and clasped his hands. Would she mind were he in truth to die? Had he any right to hope even that she should? Would she care?" he said aloud.

"Your hour is passed!"

Ralph started and turned pale to the lips. He saw his visitor's aspect had changed; he had become a phantom creature with a living face. A terrible. awful human physiognomy stared at him with preposterous, hideous fixity. He tried to assure himself that this was mere imagination, that the madman was sitting in flesh and blood before him; but, as the creature rose, the truth was self-evident-a sickening reality. Through the shadowy body, as it neared him, he could see the room beyond. He sprang up with a cry of desperation, but the awful eyes paralyzed his movements. He sank down again in abject Steadily those eyes stared, grey and awful,



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horrible with the horror of eternal damnation, hideous with the hideousness of hell, into the depths of his soul, filling his being with unutterable terror. It flashed upon him with agonising certainty that those eyes would stare him, stare him to death.

He dared not move, he dared not look elsewhere only return the frightful gaze that reflected his horror with mocking invincible power. Ah! surely not such a maddening torture—such an awful death? writhed and wrestled, but the eyes defied his movements, he could not look away; all the nerves of his body, the consciousness of his mind, the very vitality of his system were absorbed by paralyzing fear. Time brought no relaxation, every moment seemed "Pity! pity!" he cried, but the grey an eternity. eyes watched him. "Help, help, help!" The impotent words echoed back on his hearing. His voice was a whisper. He tried to listen for the sound of footsteps—the footsteps he knew would not come. No one would penetrate his room at such an hour. Yet he listened. His heart leapt. Did he hear a faint noise echoing down the long passage? Again he struggled with a superhuman effort to release himself from the power of the phantom figure, the ghastly face and the eyes—the eyes that watched without mercy.

But slowly, in torture, life was waning from his wearied frame. He sank on the ground clutching at the rug with distended white fingers. "Mary," he murmured. And the eyes still stared.

Susan Swift felt herself awakened by a hand on her



shoulder. Recollections of the haunted room kept her listening to the throbbing of her own heart with firmly closed, though wakeful eyes. She had a huge inclination to scream, but Lady Wallace had publicly asserted that Miss Swift would scream "like the rest of the world if she saw a ghost," so Susan Swift naturally wasn't going to scream. An American girl doesn't scream at a ghost. The thing's a lot too peculiar to waste time in screaming over. Nevertheless it was a nasty moment which necessitated the opening of an eye to stare a real live apparition right in the face! She did so at last, however, and nothing more frightening than Mary Clifford stood before her - pale enough, indeed, for the very concentrated essence of ghostdom—her great eyes wide open, as if it were not the middle of the night, and time for reasonable beings at least to feel drowsy.

"Get up, Miss Swift. Look! Here is your dressing gown!"

"Is it a fire?" said Susan, sitting up suddenly.

"No," said the girl. "Oh! don't let us waste time
. You must come with me."

"Well, what do you want me to do, any way?"

"You must come with me to Mr. Segwell's room."

The American was fairly aghast. "I think not," she said deliberately.

"Susan, Susan, you must come; I can't explain only I beg you to come."

"Miss Clifford, you are stark mad!"

The girl groaned.

"You must be considerably scared about something, but nothing could justify such a preposterous notion!"

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A look of despair crept into Mary Clifford's face: she turned away. "I thought you, being an American, would be brave and kind. I thought I could trust you . . . but I must go alone!" In a moment she was at the door. Susan leapt from her bed and scrambled into her dressing gown. She didn't see why an American should be expected not to mind prowling about in the middle of the night into a man's bedroom, but she knew she wasn't going to let Mary Clifford go alone anyhow! As to feeling brave, she simply felt terrified!

She groped her way to the door; her little visitor was out of sight. She hesitated a moment, then hastened across the gallery, which ran three sides of the great hall, and turned into a corridor. Far up it Mary Clifford, in her white nightdress, was hurrying; her candle made a stream of warm light on the dark polished oak floor. As she passed the narrow windows here and there her figure was bathed in a flood of moonlight. Susan called to her, and she waited. In another moment they were together silently making their way down a winding staircase and thence to another interminable corridor, this one without windows, doors only breaking the heavy carved panelling into deep recesses. The little American was beginning to feel very miserable. Where were they going? And would they ever find their way back? A sensation of real fear was creeping over her, and a desperate resolution forming to seize hold of the child and drag her back at any cost. Suddenly they both stopped, each affected by some unaccountable emotion. Mary turned round, and, with no sign of fear on her pale, beautiful face, said

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gently, taking the elder woman's hand, "You are not afraid?"

"Is there anything about me that looks afraid," the elder woman answered audaciously, her heart in her mouth. Then they went on up another staircase, through a great swing door which seemed to cut them off from the habitable part of the house. Neither had ever been there before, yet Mary hastened as one who knew the way by instinct. At last they stood still.

"I had to come, Miss Swift," she explained. "I cannot tell you why, because I do not know. A power stronger than myself forced me. You know he was——"

"I understand," Susan interrupted. A world of sorrow shadowed the girl's face. A sudden born pity for the almost child-woman possessed the little American, and a strange sense of imminent calamity made her straighten where she stood, and lash back the tears that had welled to her eyes. Then in a moment Mary Clifford had opened a door.

A keen draught extinguished their candle as the two entered the room. A door opposite them was open, and on the floor, in a flood of light, lay the body of Ralph Segwell.

The unhappy girl knelt down and chafed the cold hands and kissed the dead face. "We are too late, too late!" she cried despairingly. "Ralph, Ralph, come back. Anything, anything, only come back.

. . . Ah! it's not true!"

Then the click of a turning lock vibrated through the room. The door that led nowhere had closed.



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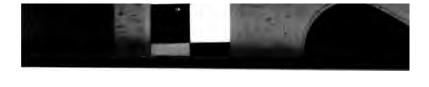
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